

EPP GROUP NEIGHBOURHOOD ACTIVITIES

Enlargement and Neighbourhood Policy
2004-2009



EPP Group
in the European Parliament

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CONTENTS

▶ INTRODUCTION	P 3
▶ OVERVIEW	P 7
▶ EPP-ED GROUP ACTIVITIES AND INITIATIVES	P 11
> International EPP-ED Conference on student mobility in the framework of the Bologna Process Zagreb, Croatia, 21 November 2008	P 13
> Meeting of the EPP-ED Bureau Sarajevo, Bosnia-Herzegovina, 6-7 December 2007	P 17
> Meeting of the EPP-ED Bureau Split, Croatia, 11 May 2006	P 25
> Group Seminar on a «Road map for Belarus» Brussels, 31 March 2009	P 35
> Meetings with Ambassadors and representatives of the Permanent Missions to the EU of Eastern European and South Caucasus States Brussels, 4 March 2009	P 37
> Visit to the European Parliament of Aliaksandr Milinkievich, Chairman of the Movement for Freedom of Belarus Brussels, 8 October 2008	P 39
> Belarus Week in the European Parliament Strasbourg, 10-13 March 2008	P 41
> EPP-ED Study Day on Belarus Brussels, 8 February 2007	P 45
> EPP-ED Group Bureau meeting Gdansk, Poland, 1-2 September 2005	P 47
> EPP-ED Group Bureau meeting Bucharest, Romania, 2-3 June 2005	P 49
> EPP-ED Group Bureau meeting Sofia, Bulgaria 7-8 April 2005	P 53
▶ ACTIVITIES OF THE EPP-ED WORKING GROUP ON ENLARGEMENT AND NEIGHBOURHOOD POLICY	P 57
▶ EPP-ED GROUP AND NEIGHBOURS WEBSITE ON SOUTH EASTERN EUROPE, EASTERN EUROPE AND SOUTH CAUCASUS A COMPREHENSIVE OVERVIEW OF THE GROUP'S ACTIVITIES	P 61



Marian-Jean MARINESCU,
Vice Chairman of the EPP-ED Group



Vito BONSIGNORE,
Vice Chairman of the EPP-ED Group

INTRODUCTION

The EPP-ED Group has always been a leading force in the EU enlargement process and has tirelessly campaigned for a reunified Europe. Throughout the 2004-2009 parliamentary term, the EPP-ED Group made concerted efforts to strengthen and extend the scope of its initiatives towards Eastern European candidates for EU membership, as well as to all countries covered by the Eastern European Neighbourhood Policy, namely South East European states, as well as Ukraine, Belarus, Moldova, Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan.

As early as 1992, the EPP-ED Group launched a political strategy of support for the enlargement of the EU to include the last 12 accessions, reinforcing its political network all over Eastern Europe. During this period, the EPP-ED Group launched several initiatives to support political transitions, including institutional and economic reforms of candidate countries, and provided political support to new emerging democratic forces. The EPP-ED Group welcomed hundreds of trainees from new Member States, organised several Bureau meetings and conferences in all the twelve countries and invited leaders and political representatives of its sister parties for meetings in Brussels and Strasbourg.

The strategic aim of the EPP-ED Group and the EPP Party for this region was to provide strong political support to the political forces engaged in the reinforcement of democratic structures in each particular country, in order to speed up democratic development and promote stability and economic prosperity at Europe's borders.

In preparation for the last round of EU enlargement to the East, the EPP-ED Bureau made a number of visits to the new member countries, in order to consolidate the political network that had been established over the previous years. Bureau meetings were held in Poland (1-2 September 2005), Romania (2-3 June 2005) and Bulgaria (7-8 April 2005). Furthermore, the EPP-ED Group also organised several visits to EU neighbouring countries, as well as holding meetings with their leaders.

As a result of its consistent efforts, 20 years after the historical milestone that was the fall of the Berlin Wall, the EPP political family is the biggest in Europe, with sister parties in all the new EU member states, as well as many of the EU's neighbouring countries. Moreover, two decades after the demise of Communist regimes all over Eastern Europe, the EPP is as committed as ever to advancing the momentous historical process launched by the European Union's founding fathers: that of creating a European Union where peace, stability, economic development, freedom and democracy can flourish.

Marian-Jean MARINESCU, Vice Chairman of the EPP-ED Group

Vito BONSIGNORE, Vice Chairman of the EPP-ED Group



*I-r: **Tunne KELAM** MEP, leader of the Estonian Delegation in the EPP-ED Group;
Vytautas LANDSBERGIS MEP, leader of the Lithuanian Delegation
in the EPP- ED Group and **Joseph DAUL** MEP,
Chairman of the EPP-ED Group in the European Parliament
2008*



***Viktor ORBAN**, Former Prime minister of Hungary and leader of FIDESZ Party
and **Hans-Gert POETTERING** MEP, Chairman of the EPP-ED Group in the EP
2006*

ENLARGEMENT AND NEIGHBOURHOOD POLICY



A. Milinkievich's visit to EP, Brussels, 8 October 2008

*r-l: Joseph DAUL, Chairman of the EPP-ED Group in the EP,
Aliaksander MILINKIEVICH, leader of the Movement for Freedom of Belarus*

OVERVIEW

The EPP- ED Group can take some credit for the success of the recent EU accession of Eastern European states, as well as for the launch of the Eastern Partnership with Ukraine, Georgia, Belarus, Azerbaijan, Armenia and Moldova, the slow but steady move towards political stability in the Western Balkans and the development of relations with Russia. These significant achievements would not have been possible without the commitment and political actions of the EPP, through its governments, its key figures in the EU institutions and, last but not least, the EPP-ED parliamentary group.

For example, the EPP-ED Group was deeply committed to preventing delays in the accession of Romania and Bulgaria to the EU. Furthermore, in order to ensure the success of this enlargement in political terms too, the EPP-ED extended its political network in these two countries, welcoming, first to the EPP and then to the EPP-ED, both the Liberal-Democratic Party of Romania and GERB, the Bulgarian party currently in government.

Nowadays, EPP sister parties enjoy significant credibility and popular support in these countries.

In order to ensure the implementation of its political strategy in the area of enlargement and neighbourhood policy, the EPP-ED Group created a series of tools for analysis and political action. One of these tools has been the monthly '**Enlargement and Neighbourhood Working Group**', a discussion forum for MEPs and other experts on the region of Eastern Europe and the Western Balkans, which has contributed significantly to identifying Group priorities and appropriate measures for increasing the Group's influence in the region.

During the 2004-2009 parliamentary term, the Working Group was chaired by EPP-ED Vice-Chairmen **Vito Bonsignore** and **Marian-Jean Marinescu**, who have overseen the constant monitoring of developments in the Western Balkans and in Central and Eastern European countries, as well as ensuring the EPP-ED is acting in unison with national governments on joint projects with relevance for this region.

The signing of the Eastern Partnership initiative in Prague, on 7 May 2009, was in many ways a crowning of the efforts undertaken by the EPP-ED Group and EPP heads of state in this direction. Over the past few years, the EPP-ED Group initiated and organised a long series of Presidency and Bureau meetings with prime ministers and heads of state in Kiev, Minsk, Moscow and Tbilisi, in addition to numerous meetings with the Ambassadors of the six Eastern Partnership countries, with a view to deepening relations and aiding democratic development in the region.

Furthermore, the EPP-ED Group initiated the creation of the **Euronest Parliamentary Assembly (Euronest)** through the engagement of many EPP-ED MEPs, under the leadership of Group Chairman Mr **Joseph Daul** MEP and Polish Delegation Chairman Mr **Jacek Saryusz-Wolski** MEP. The Euronest Assembly initiative was



Belarus Week, Strasbourg 10-13 March 2008

*l-r: **Liavon BARCEUSKI**, leader of the Belarusian Popular Front Party,
Jacek PROTASIEWICZ, MEP (EPP-ED, Poland) Chairman Delegation
for relations with Belarus, **Jacek SARYUSZ-WOLSKI** MEP (EPP-ED, Poland),
Chairman of the Foreign Affairs committee in the EP,
Joseph DAUL, Chairman of the EPP-ED Group in the EP,
Aliaksandr MILINKIEVICH, leader of the Movement for Freedom of Belarus,
Vito BONSIGNORE, MEP, Vice-Chairman of the EPP-ED Group*

welcomed and endorsed by the EU heads of state and government in Prague on 7 May 2009. The Euronest Assembly will be the first form of full parliamentary cooperation between the EU and its Eastern neighbours since the break-up of the Soviet Union. It is a political success that is undoubtedly ascribable to the ideals embodied by the EPP family. The Assembly will present both the EU and its Eastern neighbours with multiple opportunities. Among these opportunities are an improvement in the relationship between Belarus, Moldova and the EU, which will help these countries reap the benefits of the European Partnership and the nurturing of a new spirit of cooperation within two regions with increasing strategic importance for the EU - Eastern Europe and the South Caucasus. These are regions which, because of their geographic proximity to the EU and their pivotal role with regard to the rest of the Eurasian continent, need sufficient internal stability, solid democratic systems and a good neighbourhood policy.

As regards Belarus, the EPP-ED Group has taken numerous initiatives to support the opposition led by **Aliaksandr Milinkievich**, initiating debates in plenary and the adoption of a number of resolutions, as well as providing strong political support, by organising political training and electoral campaign management courses through its political training centre in Budapest, and sending numerous parliamentary delegations to the country.

The EPP-ED Group has firmly expressed its conviction that Belarus needs to invest in its dialogue with EU as a first step towards improving its relations with Europe.

Finally, the region of South-Eastern Europe has been a key priority for the EPP-ED Group and has received significant amounts of attention during the last parliamentary term. The Group has made concerted efforts to consolidate its cooperation with its sister parties in the region, consistently supporting EPP governments and expanding its political network.

In addition to countless EPP-ED missions and participation in election observation missions, the Group organised several important events, which are described in more detail below.



EPP-ED Group International Conference on South Eastern Europe students' mobility in the framework of the Bologna Process, Zagreb (Croatia), 21 November 2008

*l-r: Aleksa BJELIŠ, Rector, University of Zagreb,
Dragan PRIMORAC, Minister of Science, Education and Sports of Croatia,
Doris PACK, MEP (EPP-ED, Germany) Chairwoman of the EP Delegation
for Relations with the Countries of South-East Europe,
Paolo LICANDRO Deputy-Secretary General of the EPP-ED Group,
Ivo BELET MEP (EPP-ED, Belgium) Member of the EP Committee
on Culture and Education*

EPP-ED GROUP ACTIVITIES AND INITIATIVES



*l-r: **Radovan FUCHS**, State Secretary, Croatian Ministry of Science, Education and Sports and **Doris PACK** MEP (EPP-ED, Germany), Chairwoman of the Delegation for relations with the countries of South-East Europe*

INTERNATIONAL EPP-ED CONFERENCE ON STUDENT MOBILITY IN THE FRAMEWORK OF THE BOLOGNA PROCESS

Zagreb, Croatia, 21 November 2008

Education, cultural exchange and multilingualism are widely accepted as effective tools for achieving peace, democracy and stability, goals which are imperative in a region with a tumultuous recent past such as South East Europe. Welcoming students from South East Europe into higher education institutions within the European Union is therefore highly beneficial to ensuring that democracy and stability are preserved on the European continent. However, many impediments still prevent young people from South East Europe from pursuing their ambition to study abroad.

The EPP-ED International Conference on South East Europe Students' Mobility in the Framework of the Bologna Process, which took place in Zagreb, Croatia, on 21 November 2008, sought to identify and address the issues and obstacles currently preventing students from the region from studying at universities within the European Union.

The conference brought together MEPs from the EPP-ED Group, ministers of education from the region, university rectors, delegates from youth and student organisations and representatives from the European Commission and South East European student mobility agencies. A wide range of speakers and viewpoints allowed for a thorough analysis of the issues currently affecting mobility in the region and of the further steps which are necessary in order to remove persisting obstacles. More importantly, the wide variety of high-level participants, be they government ministers or academic staff, ensured the involvement of key decision-makers in the day's discussions and debates, thus making changes and improvements all the more feasible.

In her opening speech, **Doris Pack** MEP, Chairwoman of the EP Delegation for Relations with the Countries of South-East Europe and EP Rapporteur on the 'Life Long Learning Programme' and on the Bologna Process, underlined some of the main problems faced by students from South East Europe, such as the recognition of diplomas, the current visa regime, and the transfer of academic credits.

She expressed her firm belief that these obstacles must be overcome, as education is «crucial in order to achieve citizenship». Throughout the day, these issues were strongly emphasised by representatives from all the areas and organisations that are confronted with obstacles to student mobility. **Doris Pack** MEP also pointed out that all the countries of the region have the same difficulties and that improving student mobility within the region is an equally important aim.



*l-r: **Dumitru OPREA** MEP (EPP-ED, Romania), Member of the EP Committee on Culture and Education, **Manolis MAVROMMATIS** MEP (EPP-ED, Greece), EP Rapporteur on multilingualism and language learning in the EU, **Luciano STELLA**, EPP-ED Advisor, **Doris PACK** MEP (EPP-ED, Germany), Chairwoman of the EP Delegation for Relations with the Countries of South-East Europe, **Ioannis SMYRLIS**, President of Youth of the European People's Party (YEPP) and **Vedrana LIGUTIĆ**, Task Manager - Education in EC Delegation in Croatia*

Several Education Ministers from the region took the floor during the conference, namely Mr. **Zarko Obradović**, Minister of Education of Serbia, Mr. **Sreten Škuletić**, Minister of Education and Science of Montenegro, Ms. **Adriana Gjonaj**, Deputy Minister of Education and Sciences of Albania, Ms. **Meliha Alic**, Minister of Education and Sciences of BiH Federation of Bosnia Herzegovina and Mr **Dragan Primorac**, Minister of Science, Education and Sports of Croatia. In their interventions, they referred to their own experiences of education and mobility issues, and more specifically, to the concrete steps undertaken by their countries in order to overcome these obstacles. While being realistic about the nature of the challenges they face in their individual countries, they spoke positively about the steps already taken or those that are planned for the future and their impact on improving student mobility.

Chaired by **Doris Pack** MEP, Chairwoman of the EP Delegation for relations with the countries of South-East Europe, the Conference was also attended by **Manolis Mavrommatis** MEP, **Dumitru Oprea** MEP and **Ivo Belet** MEP.



r-l: **Marian-Jean MARINESCU**, MEP (EPP-ED, Romania) Vice-Chairman of the EPP-ED Group in the European Parliament,
Paolo LICANDRO Deputy-secretary General of the EPP-ED Group,
Vito BONSIGNORE, MEP (EPP-ED, Italy) Vice-Chairman of the EPP-ED Group in the EP, **Sulejman TIHIĆ**, leader of the SDA,
Mladen IVANIC, leader of the PDP and **Doris PACK**, MEP (EPP-ED, Germany) Chairwoman of the EP Delegation for Relations with the Countries of South-East Europe

MEETING OF THE EPP-ED BUREAU

Sarajevo, Bosnia-Herzegovina, 6-7 December 2007

Led by **Joseph Daul** MEP, Chairman of the EPP-ED Group, the Bureau meeting in Sarajevo was chaired in turn by **Doris Pack** MEP, Chairwoman of the EP Delegation for South-East Europe and three EPP-ED Vice Chairmen: **Vito Bonsignore** MEP, **Othmar Karas** MEP and **Marian-Jean Marinescu** MEP.

Numerous other EPP-ED MEPs took part in what was an intensive exchange of views with representatives of EU missions and governmental authorities, as well as representatives of EPP sister parties in the region.

Opening speeches were delivered by **Vito Bonsignore** MEP, Vice-Chairman of the EPP-ED Group, **Sulejman Tihic**, Chairman of the Party of Democratic Action, and **Mladen Ivanić**, Chairman of the Party of Democratic Progress.

Vito Bonsignore MEP, EPP-ED Vice-Chairman, welcomed the representatives of the EPP sister parties in Bosnia and Herzegovina and said:

«We start this meeting with great optimism shortly after the initiation of the Stabilisation and Association Agreement. The Agreement was the result of hard work on both sides and it allows BIH to take its membership prospects one step further.»

The Vice-Chairman expressed his satisfaction that the leaders of BIH managed to reach an understanding on the major reforms that need to be undertaken. He added: *«The reason we are here today is to support the efforts of the EU and the UN in the Balkans and to show the commitment of the EPP-ED Group to the goal of peace and stability.»*

«Croatia is negotiating accession and is expected to join before the end of the decade. FYROM is a candidate country and can expect to start negotiating in the near future. Other countries in the region also need to grasp this opportunity soon. We hope that in 2008, Bosnia-Herzegovina will be a country that can help guarantee the stability of the entire region», concluded **Bonsignore**.

Sulejman Tihic, Chairman of the Party of Democratic Action, echoed the words of **Vito Bonsignore** by underlining that Bosnia and Herzegovina is jubilant following the initiation of the SAA. He expressed his hope that the Agreement would be signed halfway through the following year at the latest, following Bosnia and Herzegovina's compliance with the remaining conditions: the implementation of police reform, the reform of the public broadcasting service and full cooperation with the ICTY. **Sulejman Tihic** thanked the EPP-ED Group for organising its Bureau meeting in Sarajevo, a choice of location which was in his view appropriate, due to Bosnia in Herzegovina's key position in the region.



*l-r: **Mladen IVANIC**, Leader of the Party of Democratic Progress, Bosnia & Herzegovina, and **Sulejman TIHIC**, Leader of the Party of Democratic Action, Bosnia & Herzegovina*

To conclude, **Sulejman Tihic** paid special thanks to **Doris Pack** MEP, Chairwoman of the Delegation for relations with South-East Europe, for her continuous support and engagement in BIH and in the region.

Mladen Ivanić, Chairman of the Party of Democratic Progress, expressed his satisfaction at the fact that after a deep crisis, the leaders of BIH were able to reach an agreement and thus solve many of the important problems affecting the country. He viewed this process as a crucial test of whether BIH «is ready to do what Europe is doing on a daily basis - agreeing and compromising». He expressed his confidence that a quick signing of the SAA would be possible and announced the adoption of the relevant laws by February-March of the following year. The next important challenge was in his view the discussion on the post-Dayton Constitution, which was also on the agenda for the following year.

The EPP-ED Group representatives held discussion on various aspects of the Stabilisation and Association Process and on matters of regional cooperation more generally, with **Hidajet Bišćević**, Secretary-General of the Regional Cooperation Council, **Dirk Lange**, DG Enlargement of the European Commission responsible for Albania and Bosnia and Herzegovina, and representatives of South-East European governments. Moreover, a debate with **Miroslav Lajčák**, UN High Representative and Special Envoy of the European Union in Bosnia and Herzegovina, dealt with the issue of EU engagement in the region and its importance for peace-keeping, stabilisation and state building.

In her opening speech focusing on the topic of European Union involvement in South-Eastern Europe, **Doris Pack** MEP, Chairwoman of the European Parliament Delegation for relations with the countries of South-East Europe, said that «we are interested in Bosnia and Herzegovina for several reasons. The country is right in the heart of the region, its stability and prospects are important for the region and indeed for all of Europe». **Doris Pack** referred to the good progress made by Croatia and said «this could be an example for the other countries in the region. The EU and other international bodies can and are playing a role, but it is up to the local elected politicians to provide their citizens with the opportunity for peace, stability and prosperity.»

Brigadier-General **Pablo Bermudo**, Chief of Staff of the EU military operation in Bosnia and Herzegovina, provided participants with an overview of the current status and progress of his mission. He emphasised the almost daily contact with the EU High Representative for Foreign Policy and described the role of EUFOR as that of providing a safe and secure environment for the people of Bosnia and Herzegovina and assisting the police when necessary. He described the situation at the time as generally «calm and stable» with some «political turbulence».



l-r: Senada KOLENOVIC, SDA Party, Sulejman TIHIĆ, Leader of the Party of Democratic Action, Bosnia & Herzegovina, and Desnica RADIVOJEVIC, Minister of Trade of the Federation

The head of the EU Police Mission (EUPM), Brigadier-General **Vincenzo Coppola**, added that the EUPM's remit was to support the local police, fight organised crime and ensure the accountability of local police forces.

Jolyon Naegele, Acting Director of Office of Political Affairs for the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK), gave the EPP-ED Bureau members an outline of the progress achieved by the UN interim administration mission in Kosovo. He reported that good progress had been made in terms of achieving European standards and practices in sectors such as banking, customs and privatisation. He underlined his conviction that the future status of Kosovo was a key to stability for the whole region - an opinion shared by several speakers in the debate.

Summing up the debate, **Marian-Jean Marinescu** MEP, Vice-Chairman of the EPP-ED Group, congratulated the political leaders present on the initiation of the Stabilisation Association Agreement only a few days before the meeting. He emphasised the importance of BiH regionally and the cultural and traditional links it shared with the rest of Europe. He called for tolerance, especially towards minorities, the rights of which must be guaranteed. His conclusion was that Europe was very willing to help, that normality was returning to BiH and that economic integration inside the region and with the rest of Europe was important in order to guarantee peace and security for all the peoples of the region.

EPP-ED Vice-Chairman **Othmar Karas** MEP chaired a second panel discussion which consisted of an exchange of views with EPP sister parties from the region. In his introduction, Mr **Karas** highlighted how important it was for the EPP-ED Group to have a strong network parties in the region which enjoy the support of both their electorate and of the EPP political family.

The President of the EPP Party, **Wilfried Martens**, acted as moderator of the panel discussions. He welcomed the representatives of the EPP sister parties and expressed satisfaction that political forces in Bosnia and Herzegovina had managed to reach an agreement on police reform. Mr **Martens** had previously chaired a special Committee on police reform over an 8-month period and said that «*the atmosphere for cooperation was vital for BiH and the whole region*». He recalled the founding fathers of the European Union and urged South-East European leaders to take guidance and inspiration from them. Their example was worthy of attention given the atmosphere of confidence, trust and loyalty they were able to instil and upon which they were able to build what is now European Union. The EPP itself was built on those very values and this was why, in Mr Martens's view, it was essential for European parties to create links of loyalty and friendship and work together for a peaceful and prosperous European future.



*l-r: Vito BONSIGNORE, EPP-ED Vice Chairman and
Brigadier-General Vincenzo COPPOLA, EU Police Mission in Bosnia-Herzegovina*

Speakers in this panel included **Sulejman Tihić**, Chairman of the SDA, **Lulzim Basha**, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Albania, **Genc Pollo**, Chairman of the New Democrat Party in Albania and **Borko Ilić**, Vice-Chairman of the Democratic Party of Serbia.

The Stabilisation and Association process and regional cooperation were the main topics of the second day of the EPP-ED Group Bureau meeting in Sarajevo. Opening the third session of the meeting, **Joseph Daul** MEP, Chairman of the EPP-ED Group, underlined peace, stability and prosperity for the whole region of the Western Balkan as top priorities for the EPP-ED Group. *«I do not want to use easy language and tell you to wait and Europe will help you. Yes, Europe will help you but this must not stop you from cooperating with each other and from seeing that narrow nationalism and populism are misguided, that they will not help this region or any other»*, emphasised **Joseph Daul**.

Furthermore, in his conclusion to the meeting, the Chairman conveyed some key messages:

«A European perspective certainly exists for Bosnia and Herzegovina; but it is not enough to simply agree on reforms, we must also put them in place as quickly as possible; we have to tackle the daily problems citizens face: employment, health and social problems».

«Our Group decided to hold this Bureau meeting here in Sarajevo in the context of a new perspective for a Stabilisation Association Agreement between Bosnia-Herzegovina and the European Union. We believe that this Agreement gives you a real opportunity to overcome the lengthy deadlock in the political crisis from which your country has suffered so much», declared **Joseph Daul** at the closing press conference.

«We came here to listen, to get a better understanding, but also to exchange our European experiences. We came to Sarajevo to transmit three messages», said **Joseph Daul**.

«The first message is that a European perspective certainly exists for Bosnia-Herzegovina. This new Agreement brings with it a real hope of change for the citizens of this country. The second message is that it is not enough to simply agree on reforms, we have to put them in place as quickly as possible. To achieve this, we will have to work hard with good will on both sides, the citizens of Bosnia-Herzegovina and the European Union». «The third and final message», concluded **Joseph Daul**, *«is that the key policies of international diplomacy are important. They put structures in place which lead to development. But they must not neglect the daily problems citizens face. And it is these problems that we want to resolve with time.»*



l-r: Doris PACK, MEP (EPP-ED, Germany) Chairwoman of the EP Delegation for Relations with the countries of South-East Europe, Othmar KARAS MEP (Austria), Vice-Chairman of the EPP-ED Group in the European Parliament, Hans-Gert POETTERING MEP, Chairman of the EPP-ED Group, Niels PEDERSEN, Secretary-General of the EPP-ED Group, and Stefan LEHNE, EU Representative to the Kosovo Future Status Process



r-l: Hans-Gert POETTERING MEP, Chairman of the EPP-ED Group in the European Parliament and Ivo SANADER, Prime Minister of Croatia

MEETING OF THE EPP-ED BUREAU

Split, Croatia, 11 May 2006

The city of Split hosted the first meeting of the EPP-ED Group in Croatia. The meeting was chaired by **Hans-Gert Poettering** MEP, Chairman of the EPP-ED Group in the European Parliament and aimed to send a strong signal of support for Croatia and all other countries in the region.

«The EPP-ED Group has always strongly supported Croatia in its efforts to join the European Union and we will continue to do so in the future. Croatia has shown a strong commitment to the principles of European integration and to the European values which lay at the heart of the EU. The country is clearly committed to fulfilling the political and economic criteria that will underpin its accession to the EU. We applaud Croatia's confirmation of full cooperation with the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia», declared Hans-Gert Poettering during the opening session.

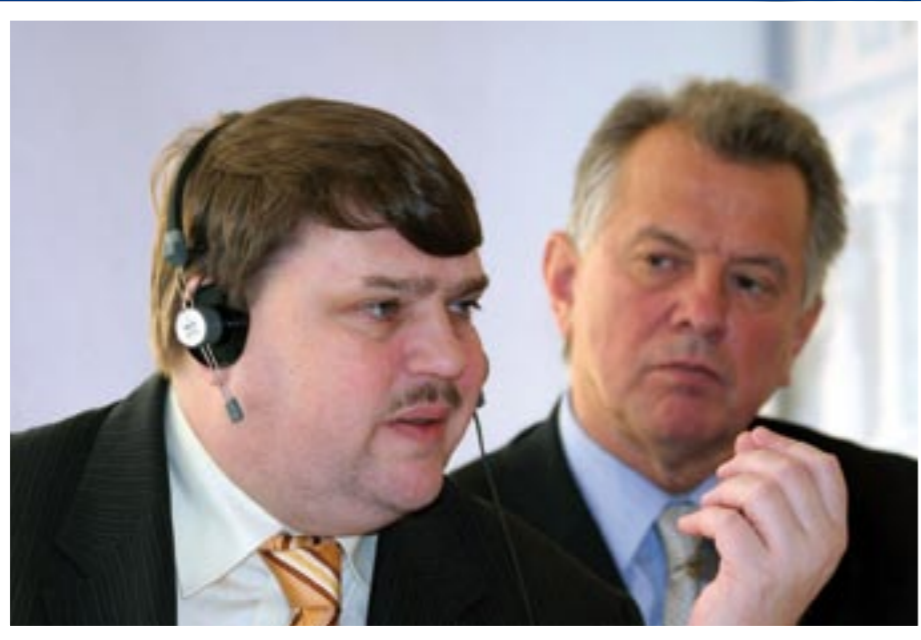
The EPP family can be considered to be the European political force which has given the most momentum to the reunification of the European continent. In the Western Balkan region, long tormented by wars and tensions which have still not been fully allayed, the EPP-ED has invested a great deal of energy in support of those countries which have been the most determined to turn over a new leaf and embrace the values and principles which are shared by EU member states.

The Prime Minister of the Republic of Croatia, **Ivo Sanader**, and other high officials of the Croatian Government took the floor during the opening sessions and provided an analysis of the political situation in Croatia and of the progress of Croatia's EU accession efforts.

Prominent speakers included **Kolinda Grabar-Kitarović**, Minister of Foreign Affairs and European Integration, **Ana Lovrin**, Minister of Justice, **Damir Polančec**, Deputy Prime Minister for Economic Affairs and **Franz Fischler**, former EU Commissioner, then Advisor to the Prime Minister of Croatia on EU accession negotiations.



Ana LOVRIN, Croatian Minister of Justice



r-l: Pál SCHMITT MEP (Hungary), Chairman of the Delegation to the EU-Croatia Joint Parliamentary Committee (JPC) (on the right), and Bernd POSSELT MEP (EPP-ED, Germany), Member of the EU-Croatia JPC

Bernd Posselt MEP, EPP-ED Shadow Rapporteur on the accession of Croatia, looked back at Croatian history over recent decades outlining the historic developments that at first hampered and later favoured Croatia's way to EU accession.

*«It would be a 'historic joke'», said **Bernd Posselt**, «Croatia will be an asset and a positive factor in the Union. It will in no way burden the absorption capacity of the EU», he concluded.*

Elmar Brok MEP, Chairman of the Committee on Foreign Affairs of the European Parliament, outlined his views on the current EU enlargement strategy. He pointed out that although all enlargement rounds, including the one from 2004, had been a major success for the European Union, EU citizens were not completely comfortable with the prospect of continuing enlargement.

*«The last 20 years have been nearly revolutionary for Europe: the fall of the iron curtain, the introduction of the common currency, all this has contributed to a high speed of change. Now we need new answers for our citizens as to why a common Europe is necessary and much needed for our future. The Constitutional Treaty gives these answers and with it we can strengthen the European perspective also for candidate countries like Croatia», underlined **Elmar Brok**.*

The Chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee concluded that in his view, Croatia was part of the ongoing enlargement round that was taking place at that time, rather than a future enlargement round that would include other countries that are further away from meeting their accession criteria.



*I-r: **Kolinda GRABAR-KITAROVIC**, Croatian Minister of Foreign Affairs and European Integration, **Elmar BROK** MEP (EPP-ED, Germany), Chairman of the Committee of Foreign Affairs of the European Parliament and **Božo BISKUPIC**, Croatian Minister of Culture*



*I-r: **Doris PACK** MEP (EPP-ED, Germany) Chairwoman of the EP Delegation for relations with the countries of South-East Europe, and **Othmar KARAS** MEP (Austria), Vice-Chairman of the EPP-ED Group in the European Parliament*

Othmar Karas MEP, Vice-Chairman of the EPP-ED Group, chaired the session titled «Towards Stability and Stable Democracies in the South-East European Region» and recalled the criteria that the countries of South Eastern Europe must meet for joining the European Union: a democratic institutional framework, recognition of neighbouring countries, reconciliation between communities and the respect for fundamental freedoms.

«It is in the interest of these countries to move in this direction, but it is also up to the European Union itself to strengthen democracy and stability in the region,» declared **Othmar Karas**.

Doris Pack MEP, Chairwoman of the Delegation for relations with South Eastern Europe, said that the European Union negotiations for Croatian accession will be a useful frame of reference for all countries in the region. Croatia however will be judged on its own merits and its European future does not depend on the behaviour of its neighbours.

Doris Pack underlined that the Balkans remain a region of instability and gave a detailed overview of the political and economic situation prevailing in each country, namely Serbia, and the problem of Kosovo, Montenegro, Bosnia-Herzegovina, FYROM and Albania.

«It is in everyone's interest to continue our efforts», declared **Doris Pack**. *«Let us maintain our policy, offer the prospect of membership to these countries; only then they can really move in the right direction.»*



Erhard BUSEK, Special Coordinator of the Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe



Stefan LEHNE, EU Representative to the Kosovo Future Status Process

Erhard Busek, Special Coordinator of the Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe and **Stephan Lehne**, EU Representative to the Kosovo Future Status Process, presented their views on potential future developments in the region.

Stephan Lehne, Research Officer at «Our Europe», stressed the need for the EU to develop a more regional approach to the Western Balkans. He detailed the benefits of a potential move towards a policy of «shared sovereignty», and pointed out the need to begin thinking of people as individuals in their own right, rather than merely as members of communities in conflict.

Antonio Tajani MEP, Vice-Chairman of the EPP Party and Member of the Committee on Foreign Affairs, rounded up the final session of the meeting by giving an overview of the EU perspectives for the region. Although precise EU accession dates could not be offered for the time being, he expressed his belief that the direction of political reforms in the region should be geared towards EU enlargement.

«The European perspective is very important for these countries. An open dialogue between the different minorities in the region must be pursued and every political activity in the region must ensure that military solutions are not the only solution to stabilising the region», stressed **Antonio Tajani**.

«Europe must think not only of bringing economic aid. This is good and very necessary, but it is not enough. We need an increase in political support for this region. It will be up to the upcoming Finnish EU Presidency to give a clear and coherent line as well as a strong political signal to this region. The EPP-ED Group is and will be in the lead when calling for such a political signal. It is up to us to provide a determined position and a clear European perspective for the countries in this region», **Antonio Tajani** concluded.



*l-r: **Wilfried MARTENS**, President of the EPP, **Joseph DAUL** MEP, Chairman of the Committee on Agriculture and Rural Development in the European Parliament, and **Antonio TAJANI** MEP, Vice-Chairman of the EPP Party and Head of the Italian Delegation of the EPP-ED Group in the European Parliament*

Concluding the meeting in Split, **Hubert Pirker** MEP, underlined that «*the national structures in the different countries in the region make an effective coordination very difficult. In Bosnia alone we have to deal with 13 different contact points, also the ethnic differences and ongoing conflicts remain an obstacle*», stressed the Austrian EPP-ED Member. In his conclusion, **Hubert Pirker** called on the EU Member States and the countries of the region to work together more closely, especially in the field of police cooperation.



*l-r: **Jacek PROTASIEWICZ**, MEP (EPP-ED, Poland) Chairman of the Delegation for relations with Belarus, **Hans-Gert POTTERING** President of the European Parliament*



***Aliaksander MILINKIEVICH**, leader of the Movement for Freedom of Belarus*

GROUP SEMINAR ON A «ROAD MAP FOR BELARUS»

Brussels, 31 March 2009

This conference was co-hosted by the EPP-ED Group, the PES Group and the ALDE Group and focused on changes in Belarus since October 2008, when visa bans were temporarily suspended, as well as on prospects and expectations for creating closer links between Belarus and the European Union. Speakers included EPP-ED Chairman **Joseph Daul** MEP, **Hans-Gert Pottering** MEP, President of the EP, **Jacek Saryusz-Wolski** MEP, Chairman of the AFET Committee, **Marian-Jean Marinescu** MEP, Vice-Chairman of the EPP-ED Group and **Jacek Protasiewicz** MEP, Chairman of the Belarus Delegation.

The first panel of the meeting focused on «Changes in Belarus since October 2008» and an evaluation of the situation in Belarus was provided by representatives of opposition parties. Discussions sought to evaluate whether preliminary conditions for suspension of the sanctions were being fulfilled. Representatives of Belarusian civil society organisations outlined persisting problems in the field of human rights and suggested possible solutions to them.

The second discussion panel, titled «Road Map: Prospects and expectations» included debates with representatives of the Belarusian authorities. The talks centred on the future of EU-Belarus relations and involved all stakeholders in the political dialogue launched in October 2008.

One crucial purpose for the discussions was a much-needed evaluation of the temporary visa ban suspension and its effects, both from the perspective of Belarus and the European Union.

Key conclusions were as follows:

- > The EU is committed to making efforts towards a gradual re-engagement with Belarus and is therefore ready to develop a dialogue with the Belarusian authorities, as with all those participating in the democratic debate, with the aim of encouraging real progress towards strengthening democracy and respect for human rights in Belarus
- > The EU will seek to encourage the adoption of positive measures to strengthen democracy and respect for human rights, through dialogue with the Belarusian authorities
- > With a view to strengthening links with the administration and population, the European Parliament should support the intensification of technical cooperation initiated by the Commission with Belarus in areas of common interest
- > The European Union should continue to provide assistance for Belarusian civil society in order to encourage the development of a democratic and pluralist environment.

MEETINGS WITH AMBASSADORS AND REPRESENTATIVES OF THE PERMANENT MISSIONS TO THE EU OF EASTERN EUROPEAN AND SOUTH CAUCASUS STATES

Brussels, 4 March 2009

Before the official launch of the Eastern Partnership, **Marian-Jean Marinescu** MEP, Vice-Chairman of the EPP-ED Group, organised a working lunch with representatives of the Permanent Missions to the EU of Eastern European and South Caucasus states, on 10 December 2008, as well as an EPP-ED Presidency working dinner with the Ambassadors of these countries on 4 March 2009. The purpose of these meetings was to discuss the European Commission's proposal on an Eastern Partnership, focusing on the opportunities and challenges that arise from the initiative and on the ways in which the EPP-ED Group can achieve more effective cooperation with the countries in the region. The meeting on 4 March 2009 was also attended by the Prime Minister of Georgia, **Nika Gilauri**. Led by **Joseph Daul** MEP, EPP-ED Chairman, many other EPP-ED members took part in the discussions: **Jacek Saryusz-Wolski** MEP, Chairman of the AFET Committee, **Jacek Protasiewicz** MEP, Chairman of the delegation for relations with Belarus, **Charles Tannock** MEP, Chairman of the EP Ukraine Delegation, **Laima Liucija Andrikiene** MEP, **Vytautas Landsbergis** MEP, Chairman of the Lithuanian EPP-ED Delegation and **Arpad Duka-Zolyomi** MEP.

This meeting was a follow-up to a working lunch between our political group and the representatives of these Missions, which focused on the European Commission's communication on an Eastern Partnership. The discussion echoed the ideas put forward by Chairman **Joseph Daul** in his opening speech, such as new possibilities for cooperation offered by the Eastern Partnership, the importance of the parliamentary dimension as well as the need to strengthen cooperation between the EPP-ED Group and neighbouring countries.

Joseph Daul said that: *«the EPP-ED Group pays increasing attention to the EU's Eastern policy which is of great interest to our political Group, as we are strongly involved in the EU's relation with its Eastern partners in the framework of the European Neighbourhood Policy. The Eastern Partnership could be considered a multinational forum between the European Union and its Eastern neighbouring states, where bilateral projects with each country can be developed in order to pursue an even closer and more effective cooperation. The EPP-ED Group believes that the new Partnership can promote open and constructive discussions on issues of common interest such as democracy, good governance, economic stability and convergence with EU policies».*



r-l: **Joseph DAUL**, Chairman of the EPP-ED Group in the EP,
Aliaksandr MILINKIEVICH, leader of the Movement for Freedom of Belarus



Aliaksandr MILINKIEVICH, leader of the Movement for Freedom of Belarus,
Joseph DAUL, Chairman of the EPP-ED Group in the EP,
Martin KAMP, Secretary General, EPP-ED Group in the EP

VISIT TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT OF ALIAKSANDR MILINKIEVICH, CHAIRMAN OF THE MOVEMENT FOR FREEDOM OF BELARUS

Brussels, 8 October 2008

Mr **Aliaksandr Milinkievich**, Chairman of the Movement for Freedom and laureate of the 2006 Sakharov Prize for Freedom of Thought visited the EP at the invitation of the EPP-ED Group and attended the plenary debate on the situation in Belarus. Mr **A. Milinkievich** is one of the most prominent leaders of the democratic opposition in Belarus and a long-standing challenger of President Alexander Lukashenko's current autocratic regime.

During the one-day visit organised for him by the EPP-ED Group, Mr **A. Milinkievich** met Mr **Hans-Gert Poettering** MEP, President of the European Parliament and **Joseph Daul** MEP, Chairman of the EPP-ED Group, as well as attending a meeting of the EPP-ED Group, meeting representatives of other political groups in the European Parliament, the Director-General of DG RELEX and other European Commission representatives.

Following his meeting with Mr **Milinkievich**, EPP-ED Chairman, Mr **Joseph Daul** MEP said that: «*Your presence in the European Parliament today carries great symbolic significance as we assess the aftermath of the 28 September parliamentary elections in Belarus and as we discuss the direction of the future policy of the European Union towards Belarus*».

Furthermore, during the EPP-ED Group meeting **Joseph Daul** said that «*I would like once again to welcome you to the European Parliament and to express our sincere solidarity with you, your courageous colleagues and with all people of Belarus. You can count on our enduring support to your strong determination to bring Belarus back into the family of democratic and free European nations*».



*l-r: **Joseph DAUL**, Chairman of the EPP-ED Group in the EP, **Jacek PROTASIEWICZ**, MEP (EPP-ED, Poland) Chairman of the Delegation for relations with Belarus, **Jacek SARYUSZ-WOLSKI** MEP (EPP-ED, Poland), Chairman of the Foreign Affairs committee in the EP, **Benita FERRERO-WALDNER**, Commissioner for the External Relations, EC, **Aliaksandr MILINKIEVICH**, leader of the Movement for Freedom of Belarus*

BELARUS WEEK IN THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

Strasbourg, 10-13 March 2008

Belarus Week in the European Parliament was devoted to the 90th Anniversary of the Belarusian Democratic Republic. A series of events were organized by the EPP-ED Group at the initiative of Mr **Jacek Protasiewicz**, Chairman of the Delegation for relations with Belarus and Mr. **Marian-Jean Marinescu**, Vice-Chairman of the EPP-ED Group, with the collaboration of the Belarusian Popular Front Party.

The aim of the events was to showcase Belarusian culture and politics in the European Parliament, to draw attention to political developments in Belarus and to discuss future scenarios of cooperation between the Belarusian opposition and the European Parliament, bearing in mind the parliamentary elections which were due to take place in Belarus later that year.

Guests from Belarus included leaders of the opposition parties, Sakharov prize winners Mr **Milinkievich**, artists and the first leader of the Independent Republic of Belarus, Mr **Stanislau Suskievic**. The meetings focused on the current situation in Belarus and explored ways in which the EPP-ED Group can help improve it and assist Belarus in building closer ties with the European Union.

Some leading EPP-ED figures took the floor during the meetings: **Joseph Daul** MEP, EPP-ED Chairman, **Jacek Saryusz-Wolski** MEP, Chairman of the AFET Committee, **Marian-Jean Marinescu** MEP, Vice-Chairman of the EPP-ED Group, **Jacek Protasiewicz** MEP, Chairman of the Belarus Delegation and **Hans-Gert Poettering** MEP, President of the EP.

Several meetings between Belarusian political representatives and EPP-ED MEPs took place on 11 and 12 March 2008. The main topics of the discussions were political developments in Belarus, possible scenarios of preparation for the up-coming parliamentary elections and existing barriers to the democratisation of the country.

Mr **Milinkievich** and other representatives of the Belarusian opposition also attended a special meeting of the EPP-ED Group. Mr **Milinkievich** presented the general situation in Belarus, spoke about recent political events, the situation of political prisoners and he outlined a common opposition strategy for the up-coming parliamentary elections. Members of the EPP-ED Group asked questions and expressed their support. Mr **Milinkievich** emphasized possible EU actions that would improve the situation in Belarus, such as providing information (by supporting independent media), providing financial support or even introducing sanctions. He also mentioned the impact that the economic crisis could have on the situation in the country.



l;r: **Jacek PROTASIEWICZ**, MEP (EPP-ED, Poland) Chairman of the Delegation for relations with Belarus, **Marian-Jean MARINESCU**, Vice Chairman of the EPP-ED Group, **Ivonka SURVILLA**, President of the Rada (Council) of the Belarusian Democratic Republic in exile, **Aliaksandr MILINKIEVICH**, leader of the Movement for Freedom of Belarus, Ms **Ina KULEY**, Committee for Defence of the Repressed



Stanislau SUSKIEVIC, first leader of the Independent Republic of Belarus

A working meeting of Mr **Joseph Daul** (Chairman of the EPP-ED Group), Mr **Marian-Jean Marinescu** (Vice-Chairman of the EPP-ED Group), Mr **Jacek Protasiewicz** (Chairman of the Delegation for the relations with Belarus) and Mr **Vito Bonsignore** (Vice-Chairman of the EPP-ED Group) with the Belarusian political leaders such as Mr **Liavon Barsceuski** (Leader of the Belarusian Popular Front party) and Mr **Yaraslau Ramancuk** (Deputy Chairman of the United Civil party) further detailed the political situation in Belarus, as well as possibilities for future cooperation between the EPP-ED Group and Belarusian opposition. The meeting was focused on the activities currently undertaken in Belarus and on how the EPP-ED Group could help improve the situation in the country.

The Chairman of the Delegation for relations with Belarus, Mr **Jacek Protasiewicz** MEP, welcomed the Belarusian opposition leaders and addressed the issue of the parliamentary elections due to take place in late September 2008. He focused specifically on the issue of preparation for the election campaign.



*l-r: Hans-Gert POETTERING, President of the EP,
Joseph DAUL, Chairman of the EPP-ED Group in the EP,
Aliaksander MILINKIEVICH, leader of the Movement for Freedom of Belarus*

EPP-ED STUDY DAY ON BELARUS

Brussels, 8 February 2007

The study day was opened by Mr **Hans-Gert Poettering** MEP, President of the European Parliament and by Mr **Joseph Daul** MEP, Chairman of the EPP-ED Group.

The first panel of the seminar, titled «*The EU and Belarus: New Challenges*», was chaired by Mr **Bogdan Klich** MEP, Chairman of the Delegation for relations with Belarus. Discussions focused on the current situation in Belarus and the most important political problems and challenges facing the Belarusian opposition.

During the discussion, Mr **Jacek Saryusz-Wolski**, Chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee said that: «*Belarus is a dictatorship at the borders of the European Union, as a Group we have to take a clear and strong position in our commitment to the fight against the regime on the one hand, and our active support to the forces of democracy and civil society on the other*».

The second panel was titled «*Belarus after the 2006 elections: Potential for democracy?*». The main topic for discussion was the last Presidential elections in Belarus, which took place on 19 March 2006. The final results of the elections gave Aliaksandr Lukashenka 82.6% of the vote, while **Aliaksandr Milinkievich** scored 6%. The representatives of the Belarusian opposition recalled how in both the run-up to the elections, as well as during the elections themselves, the opposition was denied all access to official media outlets. The few remaining independent newspapers faced problems with printing and distribution and did not have significant enough print runs to be influential. The opposition were forced to resort to distributing clandestine leaflets to familiarise the public with Mr Milinkievich's programme, and organised meetings all over the country in order to allow people to meet him directly.

The conference had a number of distinguished speakers, including two Belarusian Sakharov Prize winners, the US Deputy Assistant Secretary of State, the Director-General of DG RELEX, as well as speakers from think-tanks and other academic institutions. Several discussions broached topics such as human rights, democracy and the rule of law, all hugely important and relevant for Belarus.

Key conclusions were as follow:

- > **personal security** - the personal security of opposition activists is imperative and must be guaranteed;
- > **punishing the persecutors** - the Group should encourage European Union member states, and the EU institutions to extend the visa ban list;
- > **independent information sources** - the Group should support initiatives to strengthen a planned radio, internet and satellite network designed to broadcast independent news and information within Belarus;
- > **training seminars** - the Group should support CET in leading a series of training seminars for the opposition in Belarus, and help in working out a political and economic programme to be implemented in the future.



I-r: Pawel ADAMOWICZ, Mayor of the City of Gdansk, Jacek SARYUSZ-WOLSKI MEP (EPP-ED, Poland) leader of the Polish Delegation in the EPP-ED Group in the EP, Donald TUSK, Chairman of the Civic Platform, Lech WALESA, former President of Poland and Leader of Solidarnosc



I-r: Lech WALESA, former President and Poland and Leader of Solidarnosc, Jerzy BUZEK MEP, former Prime Minister of Poland Hans-Gert POETTERING, Chairman of the EPP-ED Group in the EP, Jacek SARYUSZ-WOLSKI MEP (EPP-ED, Poland), leader of the Polish Delegation in the EPP-ED Group in the EP and Vice-President of the EP



I-r: Jacek SARYUSZ-WOLSKI MEP (EPP-ED, Poland), leader of the Polish Delegation in the EPP-ED Group in the EP and Vice-President of the EP and Hans-Gert POETTERING, Chairman of the EPP-ED Group in the EP

EPP-ED GROUP BUREAU MEETING Gdansk, Poland, 1-2 September 2005

The Bureau of the EPP-ED Group met in Gdansk on the 25th anniversary of the foundation of «Solidarity», the anti-communist non-violent social movement that vastly contributed to the fall of communism.

In the light of this historical event, Mr **Hans-Gert Poettering** MEP, Chairman of the EPP-ED Group, recalled the Group's spiritual and intellectual values and emphasised their key place among the ideals that led to the creation of the European Union. The EPP-ED Group has long espoused the ideals of social justice, a social market economy and the rule of law, freedom and democracy. This idea was expressed in no uncertain terms by Mr **Jacek Saryusz Wolski** MEP, Head of the EPP Polish Delegation and Vice-President of the European Parliament, who said that «*solidarity in the wider sense deserves to be the credo of the EPP-ED centre-right political Group*».

The Bureau meeting debates were split into two main panels: «The EU and its New Neighbours» and «Solidarity, the Gdansk Accords & European Reunification». Significant contributions to the discussions were made by EPP-ED MEPs such as **Elmar Brok**, **Jerzy Buzek**, **Mario Mauro**. Furthermore, former Polish President and leader of the Solidarity movement, **Lech Walesa** and **Donald Tusk**, Chairman of Platforma Obywatelska and Deputy Speaker of the Polish Sejm took the floor and expressed their hope for a Europe-wide revival of genuine solidarity in the service of European citizens.

In the framework of Group activities regarding EU enlargement, Members of the Group's Bureau also met the representatives of EPP sister parties from Eastern, South Eastern Europe and the South Caucasus in order to discuss the EU enlargement process and its implications for the EU's new neighbours



*l-r: Dan VOICULESCU, Chairman of the Conservative Party (PC) in Romania,
Emil BOC, Chairman of the Democratic Party in Romania,
Marko BELA, leader of the Democratic Union of Hungarians in Romania (UDMR),
Gheorghe CIUHANDU, Chairman of the Popular Christian Democratic Party (PPCD),
Hans-Gert POTTERING, Chairman of the EPP-ED Group in the EP,
Niels PEDERSEN, Secretary-General of the EPP-ED Group,
Wilfred MARTENS, Chairman of the European People's Party*

EPP-ED GROUP BUREAU MEETING

Bucharest, Romania, 2-3 June 2005

The two-day Bureau meeting in Bucharest on 2-3 June 2005, was designed to send a signal of support from the EPP-ED Group for the reform process that Romania was aiming to complete in order to fulfil its EU accession criteria in good time and become a EU member state.

In the framework of Group activities in the field of EU enlargement, Members of the Bureau held discussions with representatives of Romanian political parties, government officials and representatives of the European Commission, and examined the progress of preparations and negotiations for Romania's accession to the EU. Several EPP members took the floor during the meeting: **Hans-Gert Poettering** MEP, Chairman of the Group, **Lorenzo Cesa** MEP, Vice-President of the EPP-ED Group, **Francoise Grossetête** MEP, Vice-President of the EPP-ED Group, **Guido Podestà** MEP, **Othmar Karas** MEP, Vice-President of the EPP-ED Group, **Mario Mauro** MEP, Vice-President of the EP, **Kinga Gal** MEP and **Jaime Mayor Oreja** MEP, Vice-President of the EPP-ED Group.

Group Chairman **Hans-Gert Poettering** MEP pointed out the large number of EPP-ED votes in favour of the accession of Romania and Bulgaria to the EU, and the strong and encouraging signal this sent to the authorities of the two candidate countries. He reiterated the widely-held view within the EPP-ED Group that as long as reforms were implemented in a prompt and committed fashion, there was no reason to delay the Romania's accession to the European Union.

There was a clear consensus between all the Romanian party leaders present at the meeting regarding the fact that Romania would have to continue to make good progress in accomplishing reforms in order to conclude its accession process as foreseen. They agreed that the reform package adopted by the governing coalition needed to be successfully completed in accordance with the terms of the Treaty and that particular attention needed to be paid to certain areas, such as the fight against corruption, administrative reforms, restitution of property nationalised by the Communist regime, human rights, the utilisation of pre-accession funds, competitiveness etc.

As regards EPP membership, President **Poettering** stated that *"the door was open to new parties from Romania to join the European's People Party if they meet the conditions for membership and if their democratic structures share the ideology of the EPP"*.



*I-r: **Leonard ORBAN**, Chief Negotiator with the EU on the EU Accession Negotiations and the main challenges for Romania, **Wilfred MARTENS**, Chairman of the European People's Party, **Lorenzo CESA** MEP, Vice-Chairman of the EPP-ED Group in the European Parliament*



*I-r: **Wilfred MARTENS**, Chairman of the European People's Party and **Hans-Gert POETTERING** MEP, Chairman of the EPP-ED Group in the European Parliament*

The presence of Romanian Observers in the European Parliament was also a discussion point on the agenda of the EPP-ED Group Bureau meeting. The EPP-ED Group was fully aware of the importance of Romanian Observers in the European Parliament and was making concerted efforts to find a practical way to welcome Romanian Observers as soon as conditions allowed.

The EPP-ED Group expressed its full support towards the reform process in Romania and strongly encouraged Romania to continue its endeavours in this regard.

EPP-ED GROUP BUREAU MEETING

Sofia, Bulgaria 7-8 April 2005



*I-r: Nadezhda MIHAYLOVA, EPP Party Vice-Chairwoman,
Hans-Gert POETTERING, Chairman of the EPP-ED Group in the EP,
Niels PEDERSEN, Secretary-General of the EPP-ED Group*

The EPP-ED Group Bureau meeting held on 7-8 April 2005, in Sofia, Bulgaria, had a twofold purpose: to discuss Bulgaria's progress with its EU accession efforts and to gather information on the Bulgarian political spectrum with a view to establishing a potential EPP-ED collaboration with like-minded Bulgarian partners.

The first panel of the meeting, chaired by **Hans-Gert Poettering**, Chairman of the EPP-ED Group, focused on the political situation in Bulgaria in the framework of the forthcoming general elections and the impact that the latter would have on Bulgaria's representation in the European institutions.

Lorenzo Cesa MEP, Vice-Chairman of the EPP-ED Group, emphasised that the elected majority would be proportionally represented in Europe and that the result of the elections in Bulgaria would for this reason have a direct and immediate impact on the functioning of the European institutions.

The second panel dealt with the economic situation in Bulgaria, the development of agriculture and rural tourism and the energy sector. The discussions depicted Bulgaria's place in South-East Europe and its role in achieving a wider and deeper European integration.

The third panel, titled «The EU accession negotiations: Internal Affairs» paved the way for discussions about the challenges in the fields of justice and home affairs, public affairs and anti-corruption measures, amendments to the Bulgarian constitution in preparation for EU membership and the European Constitution and its impact on Bulgaria's accession to the European Union.

On the topic of future EU enlargements, **Nikolay Mladenov**, MP and UDF Vice-Chairman re-emphasised Bulgaria's desire to assist its neighbours by sharing its experience as a candidate country. Furthermore, he expressed Bulgaria's readiness to play a major role in the region within the framework of the European Neighbourhood Policy.



*I-r: **Dimitris KOURKOULAS**, Head of the Delegation of the European Commission in Sofia and **Marianne THYSSEN**, Vice-Chairwoman of the EPP-ED Group in the European Parliament*



*I-r: **Doris PACK** MEP, member of the EPP-ED Group Bureau, Chairwoman of Delegation for relations with the countries of South-East Europe, Substitute Member of the Committee on Foreign Affairs, **David CASA** MEP, Member of the Committee on Economic and Monetary Affairs of the European Parliament*

In the framework of Group activities in the field of EU enlargement, Members of the Bureau also met with representatives of the Bulgarian EPP sister parties, representatives of the European Commission, the World Bank and former government officials in order to discuss the economic and social aspects of Bulgaria's EU accession negotiations and Bulgaria's role in the region in terms of further EU integration.

A significant number of EPP-ED members took the floor during the meeting: **Hans-Gert Poettering** MEP, EPP-ED Group Chairman, **Jaime Mayor Oreja** MEP, Vice-President of the EPP-ED Group, **David Casa** MEP, **Joseph Daul** MEP, **Doris Pack** MEP, **Marianne Thyssen** MEP, Vice-President of the EPP-ED Group, **Othmar Karas** MEP, Vice-President of the EPP-ED Group, **Manfred Weber** MEP, **Elmar Brok** MEP, **Laszlo Surjan** MEP, **Struan Stevenson** MEP and **Geoffrey Van Orden** MEP, the rapporteur on Bulgaria's accession to the EU.

The Group of the European People's Party and European Democrats reiterated their firm support for the Bulgarian EPP sister parties in the forthcoming general elections.

ACTIVITIES OF THE EPP-ED
WORKING GROUP
ON ENLARGEMENT
AND NEIGHBOURHOOD POLICY

Numerous meetings of the EPP-ED Working Group on Enlargement and Neighbourhood Policy took place during the 6th Legislature under the leadership of EPP-ED Vice-presidents **Vito Bonsignore** and **Marian-Jean Marinescu**. The Working Group represented a useful instrument for enabling in-depth discussions on the EU's enlargement strategy, on the EU's strategy for the Western Balkans, Eastern Europe and the South Caucasus, as well as for scheduling key EPP-ED political events. Regular meetings aimed to bring together Group members involved in Enlargement and Neighbourhood matters in an open dialogue with representatives from other EU Institutions:

- > Mr. **Stefan Lehne**, director of the Western Balkans and Central Europe Task Force, Council of the European Union;
- > Mr. **Pirkka Tapiola**, Political Advisor of the Department attached to the Secretary-General/High Representative Eastern Europe and Central Asia, Council of the European Union;
- > Mr. **Peter Semneby**, UE Special Representative for the South Caucasus, Council of the European Union;
- > Mr. **Alexandros Yannis**, Political Advisor to the Secretary-General/High Representative for the South Caucasus Council of the European Union.

The two major topics on the WG agenda were the challenges in Eastern Europe and the South Caucasus and those in South Eastern Europe. By having these items permanently on the working agenda, the Members could follow and have pertinent debates on the current situation and urgent political matters as well as the EPP Group political strategies and initiatives in both regions.

As for South East Europe, one major subject was frequently debated, namely Kosovo, a big challenge for international and European policy. The Group reiterated the fact that the Balkan region was a key EPP-ED priority and made efforts to define its strategy towards this region. There were extensive discussions on the status of Kosovo in the framework of the UN Security Council decision and consequences stemming from such a decision were analysed in great depth. Moreover, issues such as EPP Group resolutions, external meetings, fact-finding missions in the region, the Stabilisation and Association Process/Regional Cooperation and the status of candidate countries and potential candidate countries, were frequently tackled.

The challenges in Eastern Europe and the South Caucasus have always played a major role in shaping the European Neighbourhood Policy. The EPP-ED Group has paid increasing attention to the EU's Eastern Policy. The internal political situation as well as the internal development of the six countries has been important concerns for the Members of the EPP political family, who delivered their expertise in the field. Key subjects such as the EPP-ED Group's delegations to Kyiv, Minsk and the Presidency meeting in Moscow, the conflict of August 2008 and EUMM in Georgia, the internal political struggle in Ukraine, the lack of opposition in Belarus as well as the freedom of press and of expression, the elections in Moldova, the status of the Partnership and Cooperation Agreements with these countries, building links with potential candidates for the EPP membership, have all represented interesting items on which the Group stated its position. The Black Sea Synergy and more recently the Eastern Partnership were deemed useful multinational forums between the European Union and its Eastern neighbouring countries.

The discussions benefitted from the participation and significant contribution of a considerable number of MEPs: R. Anastase, L. Andrikiene, P. Bartolozzi, C. Beazley, Z. Becsey, I. Braghetto, E. Brok, P. Bushill-Matthews, M. Calia, D. Casa, E. Io Curto, A. Diaz de Mera, G. Dimitrakopoulos, A. Duka-Zolyomi, U. Gacek, M. Gahler, K. Gal, O. Gant, Garcia-Consuegra, M. Iacob-Ridzi, A. Ibrisagic, S. Jalowiecki, O. Karas, F. Millan Mon, N. Mladenov, D. Pack, A. Patriciello, A. Peterle, M. Petre, M. Pieper, R. Piks, G. Podesta, B. Posselt, J. Protasiewicz, R. Rack, C. Rovsing, S. Sanzarello, J. Saryusz-Wolski, P. Schmitt, B. Sonik, C. Tannock, R. Tirlé, A. Trakatellis, G. Van Orden, M. Vernola, C. Wortmann-Kool, Z. Zaleski, I. Zannichi, T. Zwiefka.

EPP-ED GROUP AND NEIGHBOURS WEBSITE ON SOUTH EASTERN EUROPE, EASTERN EUROPE AND SOUTH CAUCASUS

A COMPREHENSIVE OVERVIEW OF THE GROUP'S ACTIVITIES

Over the last parliamentary term, the EPP-ED Group redrafted the structure of its web pages on Neighbourhood Policy and Intercultural Activities, offering a unique site for information on all EPP-ED initiatives in Mediterranean Countries, the Western Balkans, Eastern Europe and the South Caucasus.

These public pages can be consulted by Group Members, staff or indeed anyone else who wishes to have up-to-date information and news on Group activities and on the political situation in the countries of these regions. MEPs' press releases, the agendas of Group events, photos and videos offer a comprehensive overview of Group activities.

The number of visitors to these pages is increasing significantly every year, by 1000% since the website was launch. There were 8500 pages visited in 2006 against 45789 in 2008 by people all around the world.

EPP Group and South-East Europe, Eastern Europe and South Caucasus at:

http://www.eppgroup.eu/seescee/default_en.asp

EPP Group and Interculture activity Site at:

http://www.eppgroup.eu/interculturaldialogue/default_en.asp



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