

**Message from Dr. Boutros Boutros-Ghali
on the occasion of the International Symposium
organized by the European Center for Peace and Development (ECPD)**

**“NATIONAL AND INTER-ETHNIC RECONCILIATION
AND RELIGIOUS TOLERANCE IN THE
WESTERN BALKANS”**

Belgrade, 28-29 October 2005

I regret very much not to be able to participate in person in the deliberations of the forthcoming ECPD International Symposium “National and Inter-ethnic Reconciliation and religious tolerance in the Western Balkans”, to be held in Belgrade, 28-29 October 2005.

Having had very close ties with Yugoslavia and its republics and peoples over the decades of public service in my country Egypt, including the post of Minister of State for Foreign Affairs, and having been involved directly, as the Secretary-General of the United Nations, in the recent conflicts that ravaged this part of the world, I am very pleased to see the process of national and inter-ethnic reconciliation well on its way. This international symposium is an example of the efforts to lay the intellectual and analytical foundations and establish a network of institutions and personalities that will work for such reconciliation and tolerance.

I have always believed, and I can say it today freely as an elderly statesman, that the bloody conflicts that engulfed what is today referred to as the Western Balkans were not necessary and were not desired or approved by the majority of Yugoslav peoples, including those who succumbed to nationalist passions and propaganda.

How the conflict came about, its causes, the internal and external factors and actors that fuelled it, is a matter for historians and political scientists to analyse and draw conclusions. What matters today is the future, a positive future for peoples and nations of this region, who share centuries of common life and history, culture, geography, languages and indeed, an interdependent economic and ecological space.

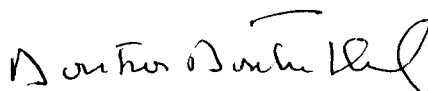
I am a firm believer in the possibility, indeed imperative of reconciliation, cooperation and mutual interdependence, of unity and solidarity in diversity. These are already happening. They are logical, given the context, and reflect the objectives and values embraced by the international community and the United Nations.

I often refer to the example of Franco-German relations, which after two savage wars in a time frame of less than three decades, evolved in a positive direction. Patiently and gradually these relations were brought to the highest levels of economic and political integration and cooperation in the framework of the European Community.

The future of the "Western Balkans" is not that of mutually hostile micro-states, jealous of each other, continuing to maximize differences and what separates them. In this context I am glad to see that the Symposium will also delve on the issue of religious tolerance, for indeed, the three religions, and the respective religious institutions, that meet and mix in this part of the world should offer an example of tolerance and promote peaceful coexistence, rather than to be one of the major factors and actors in hampering such coexistence and in continuing to stoke the ambers of nationalist aggression and intolerance, and ethnic and religious conflicts in these lands.

I am encouraged by the trends on the ground, and especially among the very young who have grasped the human folly of fratricidal struggles that took place in this part of the world. The more the young come together and the more they understand that they face common and shared problems and challenges, the greater the chance of reconciliation and cooperation after this recent period of conflict, bloodshed and economic crisis caused by the disintegration of the common polity and shared market.

I am also heartened by the positive attitude to admitting and integrating all successor states of former Yugoslavia into the European Union and the larger European space. By incorporating them in an overarching political, economic, social, and cultural environment that would be conducive to and foster such reconciliation, this will make it possible and necessary for them to come together again in a shared political and economic framework and to resume their journey to a common future which was interrupted when this region was plunged into conflict.



Boutros Boutros-Ghali

Chairman of the South Centre Board and
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18 October 2005