Nicole Gesnot, Manager, Social and Economic Development Programs in the Balkans, Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), noted that despite the challenges and the still open wounds, Southeastern Europe is a region that seeks and explores paths to a brighter and more stable future. The very fact that policy makers from across the region stood side by side in a conference discussing their countries' challenges and opportunities, Ms. Gesnot added, was a reflection of the positive evolution of Southeastern Europe.

CIDA has reflected this evolution by moving from emergency assistance to post-conflict reconstruction to support for transition to open, stable and prosperous societies. According to Ms. Gesnot, CIDA's programming in Southeastern Europe has been based on three main ideas: economic rehabilitation, peace-building and security, and social sustainability. She said that the challenge now facing CIDA was to mature its aid program in the region and to systematically gear it towards economic, social and political transition. Reflective of the increased regional convergence of issues and challenges, CIDA's Eastern and Western Balkans programs were brought within one single program last summer.

According to Ms. Gesnot, CIDA seeks to develop a long-term vision for its program in Southeastern Europe: it has developed a regional discussion paper called "Charting a Course to 2010," which was submitted to public consultation over the last few months.

Dr. Rob McRae, Director General of the Central, East and South European Bureau of the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade of Canada, made closing comments at the conference. The European Union enlargement is a positive development for the countries of Southeastern Europe, he said. According to Dr. McRae, Canadian assistance in their accession endeavours towards EU membership is both in their interest and Canada's interest. Canada will have more friends, countries that have strong bilateral ties with Canada, when these countries join the European Union. The new EU members will have a say in a number of important issues in discussions between Canada and the EU (e.g. the Kyoto Protocol, genetically modified foods, agricultural and fishing interests, and immigration).

There is a growing consensus, according to Dr. McRae, that there should be fewer international actors in the Balkans and that their roles need to be redefined. He said that what is needed today is less "brick and mortar" and more assistance in building governance structures and helping developing economies and economic structures, rule of law and tax systems, for instance. These do not require huge budgets, but rather smart aid budgets and delivery. The move away from dependency, encouragement of creativity, and a focus on local needs and aspirations are key elements Canada's role in the Balkans.

Perspectives from the European Union

Speaking in his capacity as representative of the Greek Presidency of the **European Union, H.E. Leonidas Chrysanthopoulos** noted that all Southeastern European countries have a real chance of becoming members of the EU. He expressed his satisfaction with the degree of progress the countries in the region have achieved towards integration into the European Union, but underlined that there were still