Contact Group Statement on Bosnia and Herzegovina – Bonn, 25 March 1998

Contact Group Ministerial

Statement on Bosnia and Herzegovina

1. We, the Foreign Ministers of the Contact Group countries, reviewed with the High Representative the status of peace implementation in Bosnia and Herzegovina.
2. We welcome recent progress on peace implementation in Bosnia and Herzegovina and reiterate our policy to support those who support the Peace Agreement, while taking measures against those who obstruct its implementation. In this context, we note the positive steps that have been taken by the new Republika Srpska government to accelerate peace implementation and improve inter-entity cooperation. We stress our readiness to assist the Republika Srpska as long as it continues this positive course.
3. Following the decision of the presiding officer of the Brcko Arbitral Tribunal, we call on the parties to significantly improve cooperation with the High Representative and his deputy the Brcko Supervisor on all aspects of peace implementation in Brcko during the coming year.
4. The voluntary surrender to ICTY of war crimes indictees is a welcome contribution to the peace implementation process. We call on the remainder of those indicted to surrender themselves to The Hague where they will receive a fair trial and we remind the parties of their obligations in this respect under the Peace Agreement.
5. While economic growth continues to be strong in the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina and is accelerating in the Republika Srpska, the medium and long term economic prosperity of Bosnia and Herzegovina is threatened by the unwillingness of Bosnian leaders to take necessary steps on economic reform and reintegration within the Federation and between the two entities in Bosnia and Herzegovina. There is an urgent need to conclude the long overdue agreement with the International Monetary Fund to allow Bosnia and Herzegovina access to critically needed international capital.
6. We are increasingly concerned by obstructionism within the Federation. The Federation must make urgent progress on police restructuring, minority returns, dissolution of illegal wartime institutions and economic reform. Refusal to restructure and integrate Cantonal police forces in line with earlier agreements and refusal to allow former residents to return to their homes is not acceptable. We especially urge Bosnian Croat leaders to honour their commitments. In this context, we reiterate the authority of the High Representative, under the Bonn Peace Implementation Council declaration, to remove from office officials who obstruct the peace process.
7. We urge the Federation parties to make greater efforts to improve the functioning of their joint institutions in accordance with the Peace Agreement. There has to be better dialogue and transparency among Federation leaders to strengthen the Federation and improve joint decision making. International assistance and mediation are temporary and Federation institutions must begin to function normally without outside help. We reiterate our strong support for a strengthened, more cohesive Federation as defined by the Peace Agreement and previous agreements.
8. We emphasize that 1998 must bring decisive steps to achieve the return of refugees and displaced persons to their places of origin. We expect to see an acceleration of returns throughout Bosnia and Herzegovina this spring. We call on all states in the region to cooperate in an all-way program of returns. In this context, we call on Croatia to make far greater efforts

to foster the return of refugees and displaced persons to their homes throughout Croatia. We welcome the adoption of new property legislation by the Federation that will facilitate the return of former residents to their homes. We call on the Republika Srpska to urgently adopt similar legislation. Threats of violence, illegitimate threats of arrest, bureaucratic obstacles, political intimidation and other efforts to prevent former residents from exercising their explicit right under the Peace Agreement and under international law of returning to their homes will be met with strong international action.

9. We call on the regional guarantors of the Peace Agreement – Croatia and the FRY – to fully implement their obligations. In particular, we call on Croatia to work with the international community to strengthen the sovereignty of Bosnia and Herzegovina and to use its considerable influence with Bosnian Croat leaders constructively to further the implementation of the Peace Agreement.

Office of the High Representative