

High Representative lobbies for BiH in Switzerland

At the beginning of the week, the High Representative, Wolfgang Petritsch, spoke at the fifth Annual Swiss Government Conference on Cooperation with Eastern Europe, dedicated to the topic: *"Five Years after Dayton: Bosnia and Herzegovina – What does Switzerland do?"* The conference was well attended – other participants included Swiss Foreign Minister Joseph Deiss and Economic Minister Pascal Couchepin, Stability Pact Coordinator for Refugee Issues Hans Koschnick, BiH Minister for European Integration Biserka Turkovic, former BiH Ombudsperson Gret Haller as well as many Swiss businesspeople and officials. The Conference attracted a lot of attention in Switzerland.

Switzerland has shown a great commitment to Bosnia and Herzegovina. It is the country that has received most of the Swiss aid to Central and Eastern Europe from 1996 to 1999 – CHF 235 million (KM 304 million) out of a total of CHF 580 million (KM 750 million). The High Representative thanked the Swiss Government for *"its exemplary engagement"* and urged it to continue to support BiH. He outlined his strategy, focusing on refugee return, economic reform and state-building, and said that there is progress, though not as much as one could have hoped for. *"My work in Bosnia can be immensely frustrating and is such, time and again,"* he said. *"But I would not be talking to you if I didn't believe that the country has a future in Europe. I believe that many of you can influence this future by visiting the country and investing, be it in Sarajevo or elsewhere. Looking back at the huge obstacles that we have overcome since the war, I find the justification for my engagement as well as the engagement of the international community as a whole."*

The High Representative also talked about the upcoming

elections and the chance they present for a step further on the way to a better future. *"It can be felt that the population is less and less interested in nationalist rhetoric,"* he said. *"It is looking for answers to the urgent questions of daily life: jobs, salaries, education for the children, regular pension payments. There won't be any landslide victories of the responsible and sensible ones at the elections this weekend, but a change of course could already be felt after the municipal elections in April. All the projects could be implemented much faster if the decision-makers of this country had the political will to strengthen the state."*

The High Representative also had separate talks with Foreign Minister Deiss and Economic Minister Couchepin. The Conference was prominently covered by all major Swiss newspapers, including Neue Zuercher Zeitung.