

PERMANENT COUNCIL No 393 - EU Statement in response to the Address by the High Representative to BiH, H.E. Ambassador Wolfgang Petritsch

I have the honour to speak on behalf of the European Union. The associated countries, Bulgaria, Cyprus, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Romania, the Slovak Republic, Slovenia, the Czech Republic and Turkey subscribe to this statement.

The European Union is pleased to welcome High Representative Petritsch at his last appearance before the Permanent Council. His readiness to brief this Council on a regular basis throughout his tenure has been highly appreciated by the EU. It is our sincere hope that Ambassador Petritsch's successor, Lord Ashdown, who will also act as a Special Representative of the EU, will continue this valuable form of dialogue with the Permanent Council as well as the good cooperation with Ambassador Beecroft, whom we also warmly welcome here today.

The EU shares the assessment just given of progress in Bosnia and Herzegovina during the last three years. As always, and correctly so, a complex picture has been presented, but the general direction has been the right one. With recent developments, especially the constitutional amendments in the Entities, we agree there is now a window of opportunity to accelerate reforms and promote inter-ethnic tolerance. A significant path in this process will be the arrest and bringing to judgment of those indicted by the ICTY for war crimes. The EU also welcomes the significant increase in the flow of the minority returns. We are also glad to hear that the process of downsizing the Entity Armed Forces to a financially more viable level has begun.

The EU welcomes the opening last Tuesday 7th of Bosnia and Herzegovina-wide Broadcasting System Television News Service (PBS) and supports the High Representative's strategy to restructure the PBS system to develop a Bosnia and Herzegovina state level public broadcasting system for all citizens.

The EU has already declared its willingness and intention to strengthen its comprehensive effort in Bosnia and Herzegovina. This will be realized both through the EU Police Mission (where planning is already well under way) and through European Community assistance including that to the development of the rule of law in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

As Ambassador Petritsch has reminded us, a crucial lesson learnt has been that of the need for coordination and cooperation of the international community. The steps taken towards streamlining the international presence in Bosnia and Herzegovina have already improved structures to this end. The EU stands ready to cooperate closely with the OSCE. In this regard, we believe the OSCE has an important role to play in a broad spectrum of areas in Bosnia and Herzegovina and look forward to detailed discussions with partners and the OSCE Mission on the future work of the OSCE there.

Finally, the EU wishes to thank High Representative Petritsch for his commitment and hard work in a very challenging job. We believe that the balance he has struck between decisive intervention and encouraging Bosnia and Herzegovina ownership and responsibility has made an important contribution to reaching our common goals of peace and reconciliation. Above all, your name, Ambassador, will be linked to the Mrakovica-Sarajevo Agreement of 27 March, setting up a historic compromise that leads to the full representation of all nationalities in both entities of Bosnia and Herzegovina. The subsequent changes of the entities constitutions mark the most significant progress in advancing the Dayton-Paris Peace Process. We thank Wolfgang Petritsch and wish him all the best in his future endeavours.