

OHR Welcomes Forward Looking Speech



The Office of the High Representatives today welcomed the speech made by SDA President Sulejman Tihic at the party's new year's press conference. It marks an attempt to break from dead-end policies that have too often been the hallmark of BiH politics, and instead focuses squarely on the future, while accepting that the responsible institutions must work objectively on dealing with the legacy of the past. The International Community and the EU have long been calling on BiH leaders to demonstrate their responsibility for the state and move it towards the EU and NATO. In his speech, Mr. Tihic promises exactly that. The hope is to see such a statesman-like speech reflected by other leaders and to move from words to action.

As noted before by the Peace Implementation Council Steering Board, the responsibility for taking the country forward has been given to the authorities in BiH. Despite this, many BiH leaders have failed to demonstrate responsibility and ownership for reform or a responsibility towards the country as a whole.

The failure over the past two and half years to take the country forward by upholding the Dayton Peace Agreement and honouring the country's commitments for advancing towards the EU has not only reflected badly on Bosnia and Herzegovina's international reputation, but it has set back the European prospects of its citizens.

On 26 December Mr. Tihic sent a positive signal to the EU and the international community demonstrating that at least some BiH politicians feel their responsibility to the country, its citizens and their EU and Euro-Atlantic future.

In breaking out of the negative spiral of the last two and an half years, Mr. Tihic has demonstrated a level of political courage rarely seen in this country. He has shown that a change of approach from BiH's political leaders is possible. The OHR calls on other political leaders to follow suit.

BiH authorities must renew their efforts to push through the necessary reforms; otherwise they risk distancing BiH from the EU. 2009 will be a key year for Bosnia and Herzegovina. The whole region is moving towards the EU and citizens of this country are entitled to expect concrete activities to raise living standards and accelerate progress along the European road. Without a change of approach BiH will fall behind its neighbours.

The OHR recalls that both the Steering Board of the Peace Implementation Council and EU Foreign Ministers have welcomed the joint statement by the Presidents of SDA, SNSD and HDZ BiH of 8 November in Prud as a means of building the country's capacity to make progress. The OHR looks to the BiH authorities to put these proposals into concrete form and calls on political leaders in BiH recognize the support given to the joint statement from Prud by the PIC and EU Foreign Ministers.