

Maintaining Security and Stability



As a result of improvements in the security situation, EUFOR has been able to assume a discreet and inconspicuous posture and the number of peacekeepers in Bosnia and Herzegovina is set to decline in the spring, the High Representative and EU Special Representative, Christian Schwarz-Schilling, and EUFOR Commander, Rear Admiral Hans-Jochen Witthauer, wrote in a joint article published today.

A decision in principle to reduce the number of troops in Bosnia and Herzegovina was taken by EU foreign ministers earlier this month and planning for this reduction is underway. A definitive decision on implementing the reduction, that is likely to be from 6,000 to 2,500, is scheduled for the end of February.

“As on previous occasions, this decision will be based on a thorough assessment of the security situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina and the region,” the High Representative/EU Special Representative and EUFOR Commander wrote in a text that appeared in *Dnevni avaz*, *Nezavisne novine* and *Večernji list*. “The European Union will not put this country’s hard-won security at risk.”

“The planned reduction should not be interpreted as a lessening of the European Union’s commitment to Bosnia and Herzegovina ,” the two senior international officials wrote. “Rather, it should be viewed as recognition of the huge

progress that this country has made in strengthening its own security structures.”

Mr Schwarz-Schilling and Admiral Witthauer noted that first-time visitors to Sarajevo and other cities in Bosnia and Herzegovina are often pleasantly surprised by how relaxed and normal life in this country appears.

“The fact is that the normality of everyday life in Bosnia and Herzegovina is one of the great achievements of the peace process; it stands as a testament to how far this country has come in recent years,” they wrote.

The High Representative/EU Special Representative and EUFOR Commander pointed out that the European Union is reinforcing its civilian presence in Bosnia and Herzegovina to assist the country on its road to full European integration and that EUFOR will remain in this country as long as an international military presence is required.

“EUFOR will be smaller next year, but it will retain the same robust peace-enforcement mandate under Chapter VII of the UN Charter and the Dayton Agreement,” the two officials wrote.

A multinational manoeuvre battalion will be based in Sarajevo and liaison and observation teams will be dispersed throughout the country. In this way, EUFOR will be capable of dealing with or deterring any possible challenge to Bosnia and Herzegovina’s peace and provide support to the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia in The Hague , including the arrest of war-crimes suspects.

If needed, EUFOR would also be able to call on immediate reinforcements in the form of over-the-horizon troops, the same kind of forces that reinforced NATO’s Kosovo Force in March 2004. Moreover, EUFOR will maintain for some time the capacity to reverse the force reduction and to re-establish a more heavyweight presence should that appear necessary.

“Such worst-case contingency planning is both prudent and standard procedure. No one expects it will have to be implemented,” Mr Schwarz-Schilling and Admiral Witthauer concluded. “Instead, we hope and expect the security situation to continue to improve to the point that it is self-sustaining.”

The text of the article can be accessed at www.ohr.int and www.eusrbih.org.