

# High Representative Hails Launch of SAA Negotiations

The High Representative, Paddy Ashdown, welcomed the launch of Stabilisation and Association Agreement talks between Bosnia and Herzegovina and the European Union, scheduled to begin on 25 January, as a major step forward in BiH's long journey from postwar recovery to full integration in the European family of states.

"Tomorrow Bosnia and Herzegovina opens a new chapter in its modern history. From now on, Bosnia's domestic institutions need to take charge of and drive forward a demanding agenda," the High Representative said.

The High Representative pointed out that BiH has come this far by initiating deep and difficult reforms in BiH's institutions, including the judicial, defence, police and economic sectors, adding that what has been achieved so far has been achieved through the hard work and courage of BiH citizens: "They are the real heroes of this process." He emphasised that the launch of SAA talks is just the beginning of what will be a long and tough process. The previous phase has been about creating the outline structures of a modern, decentralised State: the next phase will be to build functionality in BiH's institutions.

The High Representative added, "an opportunity has been created with the opening of these negotiations: now it is time to seize it before the doors to Europe close. This new phase requires BiH's leaders to take on the responsibility and initiative for keeping that process on track, ushering in a period of intense activity and effort so as to bring quickly to all BiH's citizens the benefits of an ever closer relationship with the EU. He added, "Speedy progress will

require determination, commitment, and most important of all, concrete results. It is results that will take BiH to Europe and it is results that will create job opportunities.”