

High Representative Welcomes the EC's Decision to Recommend the Start of SAA

The High Representative today welcomed the decision by the European Commission to recommend that EU Member States open negotiations on a Stabilisation and Association Agreement with BiH. He said that today's decision will put BiH firmly to the path that leads towards Europe, and marks the most decisive shift yet away from the country's post war reality.

"Today is an important day for Bosnia and Herzegovina . From today the agenda has changed, and from tomorrow BiH is another country, he said.

Once SAA negotiations are underway, BiH will have a clear view of where it is going and what has to be done in order to get there. The journey will be long and tough – but there is now a clear objective and a clear prospect of achieving that objective, he added

The High Representative said that it is now important to see a follow-up to the EC endorsed police reform agreement, and noted that Commissioner Olli Rehn earlier this week said that the Commission will want to see progress in the implementation of police reform during the SAA negotiations and further on. "It is imperative that the Directorate for the Implementation of the Police Restructuring is established", he said.

The High Representative welcomed the passage of the PBS Service Law through the Committee stage yesterday, but highlighted the urgency that this law is now adopted without delay by the BiH House of Peoples.

He also noted that the Peace Implementation Council has made

it clear that when the SAA process is underway it is ready to begin phasing out the use of the Bonn Powers and the OHR as a whole: "Provided that the necessary progress is made, by the October 2006 elections there is every possibility that the OHR will not exist and that the Bonn powers have been gotten rid of".