

OHR Starts to Prepare for Transition

The High Representative, Paddy Ashdown, is this week unveiling steps that will change the structure of the Office of the High Representative so that it is increasingly configured in anticipation of a transition to the Office of the European Union Special Representative. This reflects the recommendations made by the Peace Implementation Council at its last meeting, held in Sarajevo in June this year, and the continuing progress that BiH is making from peace stabilisation towards European integration.

The OHR was always intended to be a temporary mission, designed to ensure that the provisions of the Dayton-Paris peace accords were implemented.

"I'm pleased that we are now at a stage where we can start planning for the handover of powers, to the BiH institutions and to the permanent International Community institutions such as the EUSR and the EC, as has happened in other recovering states," the High Representative said today.

The High Representative emphasised that this transition underlines the International Community's long-term commitment to BiH. BiH stands on the threshold of launching Stabilisation and Association negotiations and participation in Partnership for Peace – so the International Community must be ready to change the nature of its representation in BiH in order to reflect the progress that BiH has made.

The steps that will be taken in the course of this year are subject to the approval of the PIC, and will reflect OHR's progress in completing its Mission Implementation Plan.

The envisaged changes are a key element in the planned transition from OHR to EUSR; the speed at which steps will be

taken will be tied to actual progress in BiH. It will depend on the ability of the BiH Institutions to drive reform forward putting BiH firmly on the road to Europe.

The High Representative is meeting with Staff at all of OHR's principal offices to explain the transition plan. OHR's staff has already been cut by more than a third from its peak in 2002, and the budget for 2005, at just under 17 million Euros, is significantly lower than last year's 21 million Euros. The proposal for 2006 would see OHR's budget reduced by a further 19 percent to less than 14 million Euros.

The end point of this process will be an important milestone in BiH's development – the point at which BiH takes its own destiny fully into its own hands, and moves forward decisively towards greater integration in the EU.