

The BiH Presidency's Inadequate Response to Oath Taking Incident Makes EUFOR/NATO Action Inevitable

The High Representative, Paddy Ashdown, today expressed his full support for the measures announced by Major General Leakey, the EUFOR Commander and Brigadier General Schook, the Commander of the NATO Headquarters in Sarajevo in response to the military induction ceremonies held in Bileca and Manjaca on 16 April 2005.

The first measures announced by Minister Stankovic in response to this event on 6 May 2005 were wholly inadequate. It was clear that the RS authorities had intentionally underestimated the gravity of these incidents, which called into question the VRS's adherence to a single chain of command and its commitment to providing a professional military service. Yesterday the BiH Presidency had the opportunity to rectify the situation but failed to do so. As a result today EUFOR and NATO Commanders were obliged to act instead of the domestic institutions.

On Wednesday the BiH Armed Forces' first multiethnic contingent left to take part in peacekeeping operations in Iraq. "These extraordinary soldiers are risking their lives and should make all in Bosnia and Herzegovina proud – it is shocking then that some in the senior ranks and certain politicians are willing to play political games and undermine progress achieved in strengthening State level command and control of the armed forces," said the High Representative today.

"The BiH Presidency had the competency to act. I am

particularly concerned that Mr Paravac underestimated the seriousness of the event, failing to ensure that responsible individuals in senior command were held properly accountable over what was a serious breakdown in the constitutional obligations of the VRS within the Armed Forces of BiH," the High Representative said.