

High Representative Warns UN About Risks to Reform in BiH

The High Representative, Paddy Ashdown addressed the UN Security Council in New York on Wednesday, following talks on Tuesday with UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan and UN Under Secretary for Peace Keeping Operations Jean Marie Guehenno.

The High Representative briefed the Security Council on progress that has been made in the fields of defence, intelligence reform, customs, indirect tax and the City of Mostar, noting the effectiveness of the relatively non-political and low-key approach adopted by the reform commissions, and he highlighted the twin tasks now facing the BiH authorities – to implement reforms that will make BiH eligible for Partnership for Peace membership and for beginning negotiations over a Stabilisation and Association Agreement with the EU.

He warned, however, that the current rate of reform is too slow to meet the PFP targets by the NATO Summit in Istanbul in June, or to fulfil the European Commission's 16 key pre-requisites by the end of June. He also pointed to "depressing evidence" that the forthcoming election period will not be characterised by a renewed focus on reforms, "but by a return to the old practices of competitive victimisation which offer, especially the nationalist parties, the best opportunity of filling their ballot boxes."

He went on to warn that certain groups were waging a campaign against the process of establishing an independent and professional judiciary in BiH, and that this could further delay the reform process and BiH's integration into Euro-Atlantic structures. In his meetings with the UN the previous day, the High Representative had underlined that this campaign was now the greatest threat to the process of establishing a genuine multi-ethnic and independent judiciary in BiH, because it was discouraging good judges from applying. In particular, it had become increasingly hard to find qualified non-Serb judges to apply to positions in Republika Srpska since the campaign began.

The High Representative also paid tribute to the contribution made by the late Sven Frederiksen to the crucial task of police reform in BiH. He also drew the Security Council's attention to the fact that the United Nations will have to consider how to address a growing number of challenges to the UN-led police certification process.

The High Representative covered progress in the Rule of Law and economic reform agenda, and concluded that despite the current slow pace of reform, "BiH is on its way to becoming a sustainable state thanks to the steady, generous commitment of the International Community and, above all to the ordinary people of BiH," and he called on the UN and the International Community to "stick with it and finish the job."