

High Representative Welcomes NATO Ministers' Positive Response to BiH

The High Representative, Paddy Ashdown, on Thursday welcomed the announcement by NATO's foreign ministers that Bosnia and Herzegovina had made significant progress on defence reform, and will therefore be considered for membership in NATO's Partnership for Peace at the organisation's Istanbul Summit scheduled for the end of June next year. BiH will first have to satisfy NATO that it has complied with all membership conditions. This includes full cooperation with the ICTY, and in particular the detention and transfer of persons indicted for war crimes to the Tribunal.

"The decision taken by NATO ministers marks an historic milestone for BiH on our path towards Euro Atlantic structures and represents, I believe, an important recognition of the progress BiH has made over the last year," the High Representative said.

NATO ministers characterized the Istanbul Summit next year as a "realistic target" by which time remaining conditions for PfP membership can be met. The ministers indicated that BiH's possible accession to PfP will be determined in advance of the Summit.

"I know – and the BiH authorities know – that what happens now depends on their fulfillment of a number of concrete steps, in order to complete the process of making BiH a credible candidate for PfP membership in time for NATO to consider this at the Istanbul Summit," the High Representative said.

The High Representative welcomed NATO's intention to review progress before Istanbul, and he noted that while the Defence Reform Commission has made good progress "there are other

areas, particularly relating to the requirements which were placed on the BiH authorities in the context of the ORAO scandal, where progress has been slow and in some cases, non-existent." He added that "there is still a tendency among some in BiH to put political games before the reforms necessary to become a full member of the wider NATO family."

The Defence Reform Commission will meet on Friday to analyse what must now be done in order to fulfill PfP conditions by the time of the Istanbul Summit.

The High Representative thanked Secretary-General Robertson for his significant personal contribution to peace implementation in BiH, and the help he has consistently offered to BiH in its security efforts.