

High Representative Meets US Secretary of Defence

The High Representative, Paddy Ashdown, was in Washington yesterday for a number of high level meetings. In separate meetings the High Representative met with the US Secretary of Defence Donald Rumsfeld, State Dept. Undersecretary for Political Affairs, Mark Grossman, the National Security Council's Senior Director for European Affairs, Daniel Fried, and the Treasury Department's Deputy Assistant Secretary for Eurasia, Nancy Lee.

During these meetings the High Representative briefed on the progress that BiH had made in the past year. The High Representative highlighted that:

- the State Court was up and running and had taken on its first major case, perhaps the biggest human trafficking case in the Balkans
- the State level government had been restructured, with the Prime Minister in his post for the full four-year term and that the BiH government now has Security and Justice Ministries established
- VAT and Customs reform are progressing, the Bulldozer process is removing obstacles to business and the Defence Reform and Intelligence Reform Commissions have been set up.

The High Representative held long discussions with US Secretary of Defence Rumsfeld on defence reform. The High Representative explained that BiH could only qualify for membership of the Partnership for Peace if it undertook far-reaching reform and established a single chain of command.

The High Representative and Rumsfeld also discussed the networks of organised crime that are beginning to be uncovered by investigations into the customs and sales tax systems, the

public utilities, and as a result of Operation Balkan Vice. They discussed the next steps necessary to exploit this information and ensure that these networks were destroyed.

The High Representative briefed Rumsfeld on the new approach to undermining the networks that support war criminals. The High Representative said "we are now actively shaking the tree, going after the people and the money that had allowed indicted war criminals to evade arrest for all these years."

The High Representative described the enemies of BiH's future as three fold; indicted war criminals, organised crime, and terrorism. He explained that there are five allies deployed in the field – the US and the work they are doing to freeze assets and target supporters; the EU and its visa bans against those who support indicted war criminals; SFOR in its operations; the BiH authorities; and the OHR itself. The High Representative said that each has their own contribution to make and, for the first time, all these activities were being co-ordinated.

Rumsfeld and the High Representative also discussed the lessons that could be learned from BiH for Iraq. The High Representative set out some of the themes that he will be expanding on in his speech to the International Rescue Committee on Thursday in London: First, you need to go in hard, establish authority, and get the tough tasks done early on. You need to make the Rule of Law the first priority, without this democracy and a stable economy are undermined. Further, you need to be ready for the long haul, this should be measured not in months or years, but decades.

The High Representative told Rumsfeld that in 2½ years, the war in BiH will have been over for a decade and it might be possible to make the transition to a different type of international mission in BiH, but we should only do that once it has become clear that the process of stabilisation and progress to Europe is irreversible.