Speech by the High Representative, Paddy Ashdown highlighting the central role of the EUPM

I am delighted to be here at this ceremony, delighted to be able to mark in this way the first few month's of EUPM's mission.

It scarcely seems four months since EUPM took over where the UN IPTF left off.

You have already become such a familiar part of the BiH scene that one sometimes forgets that the mission is still relatively new. The fact that you have adjusted so speedily to the situation here in BiH is a credit to your professionalism, and a tribute above all to my friend and colleague Commissioner Sven Frederiksen.

Today's medal ceremony is a further small landmark in the life of this mission.

We have had, of course, a tragic reminder in the last few weeks in this region of the importance of your task.

The murder of Prime Minister Djindjic in Belgrade showed that the struggle between the rule of law and the rule of the mob in the Balkans is not yet over. It underlined that this region is still all too vulnerable, that its institutions are too weak. Let us be clear about the nature of this battle whose epicentre is now the streets of Belgrade, but whose shock waves ripple across this region. It is, quite simply, a battle between the forces of order and decency on the one hand, and anarchy and barbarism on the other.

That battle is not yet won.

But it must be won, and it will be won, for the sake of Europe, and for the sake of the people of this region.

That is why your work here in BiH is so crucial.

EUPM's police officers, from both EU and non-EU countries, working together at duty stations all over Bosnia and Herzegovina are, day by day, week by week, helping their BiH police colleagues to prevail in that battle. They are working to provide this country with a first class police force, a force that meets the highest professional standards, a European police force that can stand shoulder to shoulder with the very best in Europe.

Zoran Djindjic's murder underlined that the problems we face in tackling organised crime are not problem's we face alone. They are shared problems, the Balkans' problems, Europe's problems.

We will only beat this menace if we tackle it together.

The Serbian authorities have made clear that they are determined to do so. They have cracked down on organised crime in their country, and they have appealed for help form their neighbours in doing so.

In BiH, we have to respond to that appeal, as Prime Minister Terzic and the BiH authorities have made clear. It falls to all the law enforcement authorities in BiH – to the police, to the SBS, to SIPA – to help in that. And we look to EUPM to assist them in that central task.

Because organised crime is just that – organised.

It depends on networks and contacts that span national boundaries and police jurisdictions.

So I urged the BiH authorities to co-operate closely with the

government in Belgrade and other Balkan capitals and to exchange information on these networks.

Furthermore it is of the utmost importance to keep the fight against organised crime high on the political agenda in Bosnia. As Commissioner Frederiksen and I made clear to the Entity and State authorities at Wednesday's Anti-Crime Summit, we need to prevent this country from becoming a safe haven for criminal activities in the Balkans. The European Union attaches great importance to this and we will need your help and support if we are ever going to eliminate this form of criminal activity.

But, as I indicated a moment ago, the main aim of the mission is to develop, over the next few years, a police force in Bosnia and Herzegovina that can match European policing standards. You need to build on the work that was done by UNMIBH to downsize the BiH police forces and bring them up to basic professional standards. Your task is to complete that work.

Your different task is reflected in the different mission you have been given. EUPM is not UNMIBH. Your role is to be not just a colleague, but also a mentor and a monitor to your Bosnian colleagues. It is a difficult job, and it requires patience, skill, and perseverance.

These are, I repeat, early days. Your mission is at the beginning of its work. But you have got off to a good, professional start. I pay tribute to that, and I pay tribute to the role you have played in making that possible, by awarding you these medals today.