

The High Representative Addresses London Conference on Partnership Against Organised Crime

The High Representative, Paddy Ashdown, spoke today at the London Conference on Partnership Against Organised Crime. The aim of the Conference is to establish a better co-ordinated approach to regional and international law-and-order initiatives and to achieve real short- to medium-term progress in the battle against organised crime. The Conference has gathered over 300 Government Ministers from the countries of Southeast Europe, neighbouring states, the EU and officials from International Organisations.

The High Representative said that organised crime in the Balkans is a Europe wide problem. That is why strengthening the Rule of Law must be the priority for the region. He noted that across Southeast Europe the factors that make organised crime a problem are the same; strategic location on Europe's border with Asia, weak and fractured political and legal systems in which organised crime exploits a "single criminal space" unlimited by economic, political, ethnic or geographical boundaries, and the damaging legacy of early 1990s conflicts.

Putting a BiH perspective on the causes and consequences of organised crime, the High Representative said that "organised crime in BiH feeds off, and is protected by, the weak and fractured State, by institutions and officials compromised by corruption, and by the extensive grey economy which obscures criminal activity."

To tackle this problem effectively, the High Representative

called for "law enforcement efforts every bit as organised, coherent and international in character as the criminal networks we are trying to combat. This means, on one level, creating strong systems of inter-governmental co-operation between the states of Southeast Europe and also with the states in the surrounding regions, including the EU. This means that arrangements have to be created which allow for easy and quick co-operation between the various countries' law enforcement and judicial authorities so that borders between states no longer function as havens for thieves."

The High Representative insisted that "within each country reforms to the criminal justice system are key tools for the police, border service officers, investigators, prosecutors, judges, and prison officials. Modern legislation in areas such as witness protection is needed, and for all this international assistance is required". The High Representative said that these priorities must be reflected in donor priorities and the budgets of both the BiH State, and of both its Entities.

Speaking on indicted war criminal, Radovan Karadzic, the High Representative said that "Radovan Karadzic opened the door in Bosnia and Herzegovina to organised crime, he exploited it, and has now become a symbol of lawlessness. Nothing would do more to demonstrate BiH's determination to combat organised crime in BiH than his arrest".