

High Representative Hails BiH Accession to the Council of Europe

On the occasion of Bosnia and Herzegovina's accession to the Council of Europe, the High Representative, Wolfgang Petritsch, expresses his satisfaction with this achievement by the BiH authorities and his confidence that BiH will now integrate more and more with European organisations and structures.

The High Representative notes that BiH has come a long way on the road from Dayton to Europe. Membership of the Council reflects the progress that has already been made and, by giving BiH access to institutions such as the European Court for Human Rights, membership will help consolidate and expand this progress. Today, pragmatists are in government, the rule of law is slowly taking hold, refugee return is unstoppable – more than 92,000 so-called minority returns were registered in 2001, a 36-percent increase over the figure for 2000 – and BiH is preparing for elections which will for the first time since the war be organised by the domestic authorities.

The Mrakovica-Sarajevo Agreement, reached after a lengthy and intense process of consultation and negotiation among democratic parties, is both a reflection of and a product of BiH's new political maturity, which has now been recognised through Council of Europe membership.

The High Representative takes particular satisfaction from the fact that BiH has acceded to the Council before the end of his mandate, following the fulfilment of a set of requirements, the most important of which was the passage of the Election Law last August.

The OHR and the other international organisations in BiH, along with domestic partners, have worked consistently and successfully to promote refugee return, strengthen institutions and consolidate the rule of law. This is the basis for the Europeanization of BiH. Accession to the Council of Europe is an important step forward in that process, but much remains to be done. BiH has committed itself to satisfying a broad range of post-accession criteria and this must now be the focus of activity at every level of government.