

## **Communique by the PIC Steering Board**

The PIC Steering Board at ambassadorial-level met on 20 March 2002 to consider the progress of the leading BiH political parties to reach an agreement on the implementation of the Constituent Peoples' Decision.

It notes that in the last ten days there has been genuine movement towards an agreement. The Steering Board welcomes the relentless efforts of the High Representative to facilitate a homegrown solution and commends those who have constructively contributed to the negotiations thus far.

It is the obligation of the political leaders of the country to reach agreement and implement the Constituent Peoples' Decision. Narrow party interests need to be overcome and refusal to participate in these negotiations would be wholly unacceptable. Those calling for an imposition of constitutional changes are undermining the ongoing negotiation efforts and do not contribute to Bosnia and Herzegovina's wider democratic development.

The Steering Board recalls that it has repeatedly requested the implementation of the Constitutional Court Decision with a view to reach symmetry in substance, as stated in the PIC SB Communique of 21 June 2001. The cantonal structure of the Federation and the centralised system in the Republika Srpska do not allow for structurally identical solutions. Symmetry in substance means that the three constituent peoples of Bosnia and Herzegovina must, in both Entities, be fully empowered. Furthermore, their vital interests must be protected and they must be fully represented in the institutional and decision-making set-up of the Entities. The rights of the Others must also be guaranteed.

The time has come for the parties to reach closure on this matter and to turn their attention to the social and economic challenges that face the country. An Agreement – which would not only allow for the proper conduct of the October 2002 general elections but also serve as proof that BiH is indeed ready for forthcoming admittance to the Council of Europe – is now within reach. The Steering Board calls on the party leaders to use the coming hours to seize this historic opportunity and to take the responsibility as well as the credit for a negotiated solution which will benefit all three constituent peoples and the Others in BiH and which will lead to a more efficient political system throughout the country.