

High Representative Calls On Political Representatives to Make Sure BiH Is Not Left Behind

The High Representative, Paddy Ashdown, today met with the Heads of Clubs of the political parties represented in the FBiH Parliament. Discussion focused on Police Reform in light of the crucial upcoming negotiations on police restructuring to be held between 24 and 27 April.

The High Representative said that though a small number of Feasibility Study requirements have still to be fulfilled, "Police Reform remains the last great obstacle to be overcome before BiH can start negotiating its own Stabilisation and Association Agreement." With the EC's acknowledgement last week that Serbia & Montenegro has met its Feasibility Study requirements, it is clear that the priority for BiH's neighbours is EU membership, not the destructive politics and alliances of the past, the High Representative said. BiH's leading political cadre – in both Government and opposition – now have an opportunity to prove to the citizens of this country that they too are intent on reaching this goal and that they are capable of leading BiH into Europe.

Emphasising that the EC's Consultative Task Force is ready to approve BiH's moving to the next stage when they assess progress in mid-May, the High Representative made it clear that "this can only happen if the pre-conditions are met." He added that "BiH's leaders must now reach a formal agreement on police reform, or be responsible for the delay in fulfilling BiH's EU accession ambitions."

The High Representative pointed out that in Brussels on 7 April the PIC Steering Board "emphasized that these negotiations are about the structure of policing only: they are in no way intended to form part of a debate on BiH's constitutional make-up."

The High Representative made it clear that his object in meeting the Heads of Clubs was to take into account their views and opinions. He said the negotiation process had to be kept manageable but encouraged all parties to make their views known so that they could be included in the debate.

The High Representative reiterated the need for compromise, which he said was possible in many areas but he warned that "there can be no compromise on the EU principles" which place legislative and budgetary competencies at State-level, ensure policing is carried out in functional areas, and remove political interference from operational policing.

"If we succeed," the High Representative said, "these negotiations will provide BiH with a decent system of policing, one which can win the battle against crime, rather than losing it. If we fail then we condemn BiH to remain in Europe's backwaters. This is not a Decision I can impose it is one you must agree on."