High Representative addresses UN Security Council

The High Representative, Wolfgang Petritsch, addressed the UN Security Council in New York on Tuesday, his sixth report to the Council since he took up his mandate in Bosnia and Herzegovina in August 1999.

EU High Representative for Common Foreign and Security Policy Javier Solana, and the UN Secretary General's Special Representative in BiH Jacques Paul Klein also participated in the Security Council session, which was chaired by Jan Petersen, foreign minister of Norway, which currently holds the presidency of the Council.

The High Representative described the progress that has been made in the more than two and a half years since he began his work in BiH. He noted that improved cooperation from the authorities in Belgrade and Zagreb, following the demise of the former nationalist regimes, and the new willingness on the part of BiH politicians to take ownership of the country's problems, had changed the political climate and contributed to positive developments.

The High Representative briefed the Security Council on a reinvigorated programme of judicial reform which will restructure the BiH court system over the next two years, depoliticise the appointments procedure and include the introduction of a High Judicial Council and the reform of the civil and criminal procedure codes. He also reported that the five CIPS laws were passed at the end of 2001, giving BiH an effective tool in the fight against cross-border crime and terrorism and at the same time bringing closer the possibility

of visa-free international travel for BiH citizens.

He thanked UNMIBH and IPTF for the strenuous efforts they have made in promoting police reform, and he expressed his appreciation to Javier Solana for the “decisive and constructive approach” of the EU in undertaking the Police Mission (EUPM) which will take over from the IPTF on 1 January 2003.

The High Representative referred to steps currently being taken to facilitate the trial of war crimes in BiH. At the same time, he called on the BiH authorities to fulfill their existing obligations in respect of arresting indictees. “I remain firmly convinced that unless Radovan Karadzic, Ratko Mladic and other indictees end up in The Hague, people will not be able to turn the page and look to the future,” the High Representative told the Security Council, and he thanked COMSFOR General John Sylvester and his soldiers for their courageous undertakings in this respect.

The High Representative noted that attempts by nationalist parties to erode the integrity of BiH had been staunchly resisted. He described efforts to promote functional integration through the creation of effective State-level independent regulatory institutions, and he outlined reforms instituted in order to establish a modern public broadcasting system spanning the whole country.

Commenting on the current talks among political parties on the optimum way of implementing the Constitutional Court’s Decision on the constituency of peoples, the High Representative said, “this is a moment when the country must establish internal equilibrium founded on a constructive interdependence of all groups.” He stressed that “the parties must be given every opportunity to produce ‘home-grown’

solutions, arrived at by BiH leaders for the benefit of BiH citizens."

The High Representative reported that 92,000 so-called minority returns had been recorded during 2001, a 36 percent increase over the figure for 2000, and he paid tribute to UNHCR's crucial role in this achievement. "The momentum of refugee return is unstoppable because a new kind of consciousness has developed," he said. "People have realised that practical politics, not nationalist rhetoric, will solve their economic and social problems."

The High Representative noted that economic growth has been maintained at a modest five percent, despite declining donor aid, and he outlined the streamlining plan, which will deliver "a leaner, less bureaucratic IC presence in BiH with reduced overall costs" and at the same time enable the IC to do more with fewer resources.

The High Representative informed the Security Council of his intention to leave his post at the end of May. He said he was proud to have played a part in the improving situation of BiH and he asked for continued support for his successor and friend, Paddy Ashdown, when he takes over as High Representative.

The High Representative concluded by saying that, with a solid foundation in place, there is now an opportunity to return BiH to its rightful place – in the hands of its own citizens.

During his visit to New York the High Representative held talks with, among others, the UN ambassadors from the Contact Group plus Austria and representatives of the Security Council Norway, Bulgaria and Ireland.