

High Representative addresses EU General Affairs Council

The High Representative, Wolfgang Petritsch, yesterday in Brussels addressed the foreign ministers of the European Union, at the EU's General Affairs Council. The High Representative highlighted the fact that Bosnia and Herzegovina has moved forward in the past three years and a basic – yet solid – foundation has been put in place on which to build a viable and stable state capable of meeting its responsibilities to its citizens as well as its international obligations. He called upon the EU Foreign Ministers to engage Bosnia and Herzegovina and provide it with a clear and achievable perspective as a supportive yet demanding partner. In the course of his visit to Brussels, the High Representative also met with Austrian Foreign Minister Benita Ferrero-Waldner, Croatian Foreign Minister Tonino Picula, and the Special Coordinator of the Stability Pact, Erhard Busek, and briefed them on current developments in BiH.

In his speech, the High Representative informed the Foreign Ministers about recent progress regarding refugee return and implementation of the property laws, economic reform, and the consolidation of institutions. He said that the more than 92,000 minority returns registered in the course of 2001 were the ultimate proof that the architects of ethnic cleansing have not achieved their goals. The High Representative reiterated that Bosnia and Herzegovina still faces significant challenges, first and foremost the implementation of the Constitutional Court's decision on the Constituency of Peoples. The reform of the Entity Constitutions represents *the* test case that will determine whether Bosnia and Herzegovina develops into a state committed to human rights and the rule of law. As the reform of the Constitutions in its very essence

is a matter of ownership, this represents an obligation that local politicians must fulfil, and an opportunity that they must seize. Only by finding "internal equilibrium founded on the interdependence of all groups," can the country make up for lost time and move closer to Europe, the High Representative said.

The High Representative again stated the urgency of arresting Radovan Karadzic and Ratko Mladic and bringing them before the International War Crimes Tribunal in The Hague. "Milosevic is in The Hague. Karadzic and Mladic must join him – now!", he told the General Affairs Council.

The High Representative welcomed the engagement of the EU in the police mission which will take over from the IPTF at the beginning of 2003. He noted that the mission will demonstrate the EU's intention to play a leading political role and to support structural reform crucial to BiH's Europeanisation process. The High Representative warned that if Bosnia and Herzegovina's problems are not resolved, they will surely be exported to the rest of the continent.

The High Representative also informed the Foreign Ministers that he will leave his post by the end of May this year. The EU Presidency thanked the High Representative for the successful work he has done and expressed its continued full support for his work until the end of his tenure.

Meeting with the Special Coordinator for the Stability Pact, Erhard Busek, the High Representative discussed Bosnia and Herzegovina's contribution to regional cooperation in the Balkans.