

High Representative meets US Deputy Secretary of State

Concluding a week-long series of high-level talks in the United States, the High Representative, Wolfgang Petritsch, yesterday morning met with US Deputy Secretary of State, Richard Armitage, in Washington.

The two officials discussed the current status of the peace process in Bosnia and Herzegovina and the US role in the region after the September 11 attacks against the United States. Deputy Secretary of State Armitage assured the High Representative that the United States continues to be fully committed to Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Discussing the effects of the September 11 attacks and the global fight against terrorism, the High Representative said the BiH authorities have acted responsibly and swiftly to live up to this challenge and have demonstrated their commitment to eliminating the threat of terrorism. The two officials agreed that the new situation has underlined the need for institution building in BiH and the strengthening of the state because only a functioning state can cope with the new challenges.

During the meeting, which took place in a very cordial atmosphere, the High Representative briefed the Deputy Secretary of State in considerable detail on the streamlining exercise that the international civilian organisations in BiH are conducting. The objective of this effort is to identify the core tasks that the international community has to accomplish over the next few years in order to establish the framework of a functioning democracy in the country, as well as the mechanisms and structures which are best suited to completing these core tasks. After this period of intensive activity, the international community intends to phase out its engagement.

In this context, the High Representative mentioned the importance of continuing with the judicial and police reforms, as well as the need to link the two, and carry them out in accordance with European standards in order to further the Europeanisation process in BiH. He emphasised that an efficient and independent judiciary and police force are indispensable elements of a democratic society, and that their establishment in accordance with European standards will bring BiH another step closer to Europe. The High Representative also stressed that an efficient police force will decrease the number of tasks that SFOR troops are currently carrying out.

Mr Armitage expressed his support for the streamlining exercise. He said his country is ready to continue supporting the peace process in BiH, and that the US fully supports the High Representative as the lead international civilian representative in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

On Friday, the High Representative also met with World Bank Vice President Johannes Linn and the Bank's Country Director for BiH and Regional Co-ordinator for South-eastern Europe, Christiaan Poortman, further discussing ways in which to accelerate the economic reform process in BiH and improve co-operation between the Office of the High Representative and the World Bank. The two World Bank officials expressed their dissatisfaction with the pace of the transition process in BiH and agreed that no donors' conference will be held for Bosnia and Herzegovina unless more progress is reached in meeting the requirements of the "EU Road Map."

During his stay in Washington, the High Representative also met with other State Department and National Security Council officials. Another important topic that he raised with them was the breakthrough in minority return in Bosnia and Herzegovina and the need for international funds to make the returns sustainable. The US representatives promised continued support.

Completing his five-day visit to the US, the High Representative flew back to Europe on Friday evening.