

High Representative addresses UN Security Council

The High Representative, Wolfgang Petritsch, visited New York on Thursday and Friday to address the UN Security Council and to hold talks with, among others, UN Development Program Regional Director for Europe and the CIS (Commonwealth of Independent States), Kalman Mizsei.

In his address to the Security Council on Friday morning, which was received with great interest, the High Representative outlined the progress that has been made in Bosnia and Herzegovina during the last six months in the key strategic areas of institution-building, economic reform and refugee return, as well as his efforts in streamlining the current international civilian implementation structures in BiH. In this context, the members of the Security Council were also addressed by UN Special Representative of the Secretary General, Jacques Paul Klein, who discussed options for a follow-up mission for the International Police Task Force (IPTF) after the expiration of UNMIBH's current mandate at the end of 2002.

The High Representative commended the politicians in the Alliance for Change for seeking to establish a new and mature partnership with the International Community, and he expressed the hope that in light of its efforts to meet Council of Europe accession requirements – notably through the successful passage of the Election Law – BiH's application to join the Council of Europe will win approval.

In the context of institution building, the High Representative noted that the effective operation of the State Border Service, the work of the Naturalisation Commission charged with reviewing Bosnian citizenship granted to foreign nationals during and after the war, and the Citizens' Identity Protection System, now being considered by the Council of Ministers, will help BiH to contribute effectively to the fight against international terrorism.

The High Representative acknowledged that the pace and scale of economic reform continues to fall well below expectations, and he cited a damaging absence of urgency and concerted political will with regard to restructuring state conglomerates, privatising utilities, and promoting the Single Economic Space. "What BiH needs is the total, immediate and professional commitment of its leaders to long-term economic reform, not short-term political calculation," the High Representative said. "There is a danger that unless the pace of reform in BiH rapidly increases it will be left behind and will remain the weak link in the regional chain." He also noted, however, that economic growth – albeit at an inadequate level – has been maintained in the first half of this year, despite reduced donor aid and a weak growth of the global economy.

The High Representative told the members of the Security Council that the number of refugee returns continues to rise significantly. He commended the work of the Reconstruction and Return Task Force and emphasised that the momentum of return has reached a level that makes the process unstoppable.

The High Representative also told the Security Council that the International Community has taken a firm line in quelling any recurrence of separatism, particularly the attempt to launch so-called Croat self-rule", which was condemned by the Security Council in its statement of 22 March 2001, while seeking to ensure that grievances expressed by the representatives of BiH's constituent peoples are properly addressed in both Entities, specifically through the work of the Constitutional Commissions.

He described the work being done to advance the process of judicial reform and civil service reform, and he outlined the steps which he is now taking, as tasked by the Foreign Ministers of the Contact Group and the European Union, to streamline the operations of the main international agencies in BiH so as to increase efficiency while preparing for a reduced role of the International Community over the long term.

"Let me emphasise the need to focus on the end state rather than merely an end date," the High Representative

said, adding that, "Our task is not to work on a mere exit strategy – Bosnia and Herzegovina needs an entry strategy into European structures. Membership in the Council of Europe is a first step. The European Union has further defined the path with its Stabilisation and Association Agreements."

In the discussion following the High Representative's presentation, the members of the UN Security Council expressed their full support for his efforts and showed particular interest in the streamlining process, the progress in refugee return, and the implementation of the Constitutional Court's Decision on the constituent status of BiH's peoples in both Entities. A number of delegations called on the BiH authorities to adopt "a sense of urgency" in implementing the necessary economic reforms. The European Union underlined the need for the authorities of BiH to actively pursue institutional, legal and economic reforms as a prerequisite for further integration into EU structures, and stressed the importance of adopting a civil service law that will create a depoliticised and merit-based civil service.

On Thursday, the High Representative held several meetings with international officials, among them with Mr Kalman Mizsei, the Assistant Administrator and Regional Director for Europe and the CIS of the UN Development Program (UNDP). The High Representative expressed his appreciation for the UNDP's work in BiH, noting that its comprehensive reports serve as important blueprints for long-term economic reform. He stressed that the role of the UNDP is likely to increase as BiH moves from post-war recovery with a massive international presence, to a more conventional long-term development pattern, accompanied by a reduced role of the International Community.