

Communique by the PIC Steering Board

The PIC Steering Board met at the level of Political Directors with the High Representative in Sarajevo, 10 May 2001. The Steering Board welcomed the opportunity to meet the members of the Council of Ministers to discuss the new Government's program in a constructive atmosphere on 9 May and supports its proposals to foster foreign direct investment and job creation. The Steering Board wishes by this initiative to highlight the importance of close consultation and partnership between the International Community and the Governments of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

The Steering Board strongly condemns recent nationalist violence in the RS and Herzegovina. The Steering Board expresses its firm will not to let such incidents in any way interfere with peace implementation and reconciliation. The Steering Board notes that extremists were behind the disruption of ceremonies in Trebinje and Banja Luka. The Steering Board reminds the RS authorities of their responsibility to provide effective public security, ensure the rule of law and live up to their commitment to protect religious freedom by implementing the Decisions of the Human Rights Chamber. The Steering Board expects that the perpetrators will be brought to justice. The Steering Board again condemns and rejects the illegal and unconstitutional declaration of so-called "Croat self-rule". It fully supports the High Representative's actions against parallel structures and self-rule and the efforts to identify those criminal elements that hold hostage the legitimate interests of the Bosnian and Herzegovinian Croat public. The Steering Board urges elected officials to resume their positions in legal institutions at all levels. The Steering Board supports all efforts for dialogue in order to address legitimate Bosnian and Herzegovinian Croat concerns within the country's constitutional framework. It welcomes the initiative for dialogue presented to the Steering Board by President Karlo Filipovic on behalf of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

The Steering Board welcomes the increasing return activity in 2001 following the progress made in 2000. The Steering Board notes the return of more than 17,000 refugees and displaced persons during the first three months of 2001, including the return of 15,593 registered minority returns, double the number in the same period last year. However, the recent acts of intimidation and violence against returnee communities and the failure of local authorities to act decisively threatens continued progress. State, Entity and local governments must demonstrate greater leadership, promoting returns through the acceleration of property repossession, greater coordination between State and Entity authorities, and the strengthening of the Rule of Law. The Steering Board supports the High Representative's continued efforts to facilitate the return of refugees, in particular by supporting returns to the Posavina region, Eastern Republika Srpska and urban areas throughout BiH where accelerated progress is required. The Steering Board strongly recommends that donors continue their financial support for these programs.

The Steering Board acknowledges the progress made by the Constitutional Commission in the RS to elaborate constitutional amendments to the RS Constitution following the "constituent peoples" decision of the BiH Constitutional Court last year. It expects the Constitutional Commission in the Federation of BiH to conclude its work as soon as possible. The Steering Board calls on both Entities to complete their deliberations swiftly.

The Steering Board recalls the BiH authorities' obligation to fulfill minimum conditions within fixed deadlines on the path to integration with European structures, eg.) the EU road map and the Council of Europe accession process. A swift passage of this country's long overdue election law is a key condition. The Steering Board welcomes the opening of the PBS and Federation Radio services this week as a positive step towards the restructuring of the public broadcasting sector in BiH.

The Steering Board strongly encourages greater financial and material support from the International Community for humanitarian de-mining operations in BiH.

The Steering Board notes that the negotiation process held under the auspices of the High Representative on the equitable distribution of rights, obligations, assets and liabilities of the former Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia is to enter its final phase with the 14 May conference in Vienna. The conclusion of a framework agreement on all outstanding succession issues will foster stability and mutual good relations in the region.