

Communique by the PIC Steering Board

The PIC Steering Board met at the level of Political Directors with the High Representative in Brussels today, March 20th 2001.

The Steering Board expresses its satisfaction that new governments are finally in place in Bosnia and Herzegovina, both at the state level and in the two entities. The Steering Board calls upon these governments to take bold and rapid steps to move the peace implementation process forward, and to carry out urgently needed economic reforms. The Council of Ministers set a positive example with its recent decision to present a package of 16 laws imposed by the High Representative for early adoption to the Parliamentary Assembly of BiH.

The Steering Board condemns and rejects the illegal and unconstitutional declaration of so-called "Croat self-rule". It fully supports the High Representatives actions to uphold both BiH and entity Constitutions, to support the States highest institutions and to apply the rule of law. The Steering Board is concerned that certain religious leaders have taken the side of political parties which oppose the peace implementation process, instead of contributing to the process of reconciliation. The Steering Board appeals to all parties in BiH to engage constructively with the constitutional institutions of the country. It welcomes the High Representatives offer to facilitate a dialogue between all relevant parties on such important issues as the implementation of the BiH Constitutional Courts "constituent peoples" decision, protection of "vital interests" and the draft election law. The Steering Board notes with satisfaction the progress made in the last year in implementing the Final Award for the District of Brcko, and congratulates the authorities and residents of Brcko for their efforts in this respect. Furthermore, the Steering Board takes this opportunity to thank Ambassador Gary Matthews, former Deputy High Representative and Supervisor of the Brcko District, for his tireless efforts to implement the Final Award for the good of all the residents of and from Brcko.

The Steering Board emphasises that functioning and effective State institutions, judicial reform, respect for the Rule of Law and good governance, remain fundamental to the implementation of the Peace Agreement. Furthermore, progress in these areas is essential for Bosnia and Herzegovina's "Europeanisation", and for economic development. In this respect, the Steering Board welcomes the recent decision of the High Representative on the mandate of the Independent Judicial Commission (IJC), urges all competent authorities in BiH to work with the IJC in ongoing judicial reform efforts and supports the IJC as the lead agency on judicial reform and rule of law issues in BiH.

The Steering Board acknowledges that criminal law reform, and in particular, criminal procedure reform, is a priority issue in the development of the rule and law in BiH. The Steering Board asks the High Representative to increase efforts in this area and to work with local authorities towards achieving this crucial reform in an expedited manner.

The Steering Board calls on the authorities in BiH to establish the State Court of Bosnia and Herzegovina, and adopt the State Law on Civil Service, which will establish a professional and merit-based civil service as called for in the Brussels PIC Declaration. The Steering Board also urges the adoption and implementation of a package of five laws establishing the Citizens Identification Protection System (CIPS), which will mark a major step forward in strengthening freedom of movement, safeguarding individual identity and supporting refugee returns.

The Steering Board urges the newly elected legislatures, at all levels, to take ownership of the legislative process as is mentioned in the institution building measures above.

The Steering Board acknowledges the Financial Experts report of March 1st, 2001. The Steering Board took note of the High Representative's appeal for staff secondments, and his plan for this year to fill critical secondee vacancies with international contractors by redirecting existing OHR funding on the basis of adequate justification. If the problem persists this issue will be revisited in the context of the 2002 budget.