

Clear Public Support for More Effective Law Enforcement

At a roundtable held today in Sarajevo entitled “Police as a Service to the Community”, the Chairman of the Police Restructuring Commission, Wilfred Martens invited representatives of BiH non-governmental organisations and law enforcement experts to assess the way in which Law Enforcement agencies interact with the communities they serve.

The roundtable discussed the problems stemming from the fact that Police resources are often not deployed effectively or rationally, which has led to a piecemeal approach to tackling the burgeoning influence of crime in BiH. A review of police functionality in BiH conducted by the European Union and presented in July this year, found BiH's police forces to be divided, over staffed, under-resourced, and unable to operate across the IEHL.

Participants at the roundtable took the opportunity to make their views and opinions known to the Police Restructuring Commission. There was agreement that if public trust in the police is to be improved, then the police need to be trained to see their role as a service to the community. Closer links between police institutions and the citizens are necessary to ensure a police capable of delivering public order and the rule of law.

There was also a consensus among participants that the police are unequipped to deal effectively particularly with those areas of crime which are on the increase, including organised crime, drug trafficking and drug abuse, violence against ethnic minorities, juvenile delinquency and particularly domestic violence. These crimes are damaging the fabric of BiH society.

Chairman Martens explained that BiH's future concept of policing must start with the citizen and focus on delivering quality policing services. This means that the Police must develop a partnership with the community in which they work and with civil society if they are to fulfil the role of a modern European Police force. “The Police must be accountable to the citizens that they serve” Martens emphasised.

“The European Union has highlighted the Justice and Home Affairs agenda in BiH,” Martens said, adding “Police restructuring is one of the 16 key requirements for BiH to start negotiations for a Stabilisation and Association Agreement. If BiH's law enforcement agencies cannot effectively tackle crime within BiH's own borders, then a change of attitude on visa requirements for BiH passport-holders unfortunately remains a distant and unlikely prospect.”

Commission Chairman Martens undertook to ensure that “the work of the PRC will focus on proposing structures that will promote effective policing in BiH,” adding that “the comments we have received underline the concerns of civil society and the BiH public, who firmly support the need to tackle crime effectively.”