

High Representative addresses the OSCE Permanent Council

Today the High Representative, Wolfgang Petritsch, addressed the Permanent Council of the OSCE in Vienna. He discussed the question of general elections in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and other issues related to BiH's future.

The High Representative spoke out in favor of holding general elections this autumn under the OSCE mandate.

He said he was encouraged by the results of the municipal elections, which have led to more party pluralism and gains by modern, civic-minded parties in some areas. This shows there is a process of moving away from entrenched, ethnic-based thinking, to thinking that focuses on everyday issues, such as employment, housing, and education. The High Representative believes that this will also force the established parties to reposition themselves.

The High Representative called the shift in priorities of the voters "a dynamic re-orientation" and conveyed his belief that the momentum for change should be maintained. People should be given a chance to express their will in general elections this autumn

Ambassador Petritsch also discussed Bosnia and Herzegovina's current problems, such as the crisis surrounding the Council of Ministers. He expressed his disappointment that there still is no new Council of Ministers, although the need for one has been clear since the Constitutional Court made its ruling last August.

The High Representative explained the desirability of a solution arrived at by domestic compromise rather than imposition, but said that he has pressed the Presidency to fulfil its duty in the process. He emphasized the obligation of the Presidency to nominate a candidate as Chair of the new Council of Ministers, who meets certain standards. Ambassador Petritsch announced that the Peace Implementation Council, at its meeting at the level of ministers on May 23 and 24, "will hold the members of the Presidency, all three of them, responsible for resolving - or failing to resolve - this constitutional crisis."

The High Representative also said that the successful resolution of this issue as well as the long overdue adoption of an election law have become prerequisites for any deepening of relations between BiH and the European Union, its accession to the Council of Europe as well as for the functioning of the state of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Even if elections are held this autumn under the OSCE mandate, the BiH Parliament has still the duty to pass an election law, which is fundamental legislation to any free and democratic state.

The High Representative also spoke about the upcoming PIC Conference and the strategic priorities that are likely to be discussed there: economic reform, refugee return and the functioning of the state of BiH.