

High Representative meets with Council of Europe Rapporteurs

The High Representative, Wolfgang Petritsch, met today in Sarajevo with Council of Europe Rapporteurs Laszlo Surjan, of the Political Affairs Committee, and Ms. Anneli Jaatteenmaki of the Legal Affairs and Human Rights Committee to discuss progress made in Bosnia and Herzegovina on meeting the preconditions for accession to the Council of Europe.

The Bureau of the Council of Europe's Parliamentary Assembly drew up the preconditions for Bosnia and Herzegovina's accession in 1997. Both the High Representative and the Rapporteurs agreed there have been recent promising improvements in Judicial Reform in the Republika Srpska and compliance with the decisions of the Human Rights Chamber in the Federation of BiH. However, progress in the development of effective common institutions and achieving European standards has been painfully slow in the last three years.

In particular, the High Representative and the Rapporteurs found disappointing the lack of progress in three main areas: Firstly, the permanent election law, a fundamental piece of legislation that has been voted down twice since its introduction on October 21st, 1999. This shows the BiH Parliament is unable to regulate elections, which provide the essential basis for any democracy in the world. Secondly, the functioning of the common institutions, particularly the crisis in the Council of Ministers. A chair has now been nominated but the delegates of the BiH Parliament must ensure that an effective Council of Ministers is formed by someone who will strengthen this important institution and have the support of the two Entity Governments. Finally, a commitment to the status of key human rights requirements which includes full implementation of the property laws, complete cooperation with the ICTY and eradication of ethnic segregation in the education system. These three areas are necessary for the process of state-building that BiH is undergoing currently. They therefore represent the minimum preconditions for accession to the Council of Europe.

The High Representative firmly believes that integration into Europe is crucial if Bosnia and Herzegovina is to enjoy future prosperity and stability. The Rapporteurs emphasised that there would be no changes in the preconditions for entry, but that Bosnia and Herzegovina was a unique case and that accession was important not only to BiH but other countries in the region.

OHR and the Council of Europe will continue working with the authorities of Bosnia and Herzegovina to the country's accession at the earliest practical time. However, the High Representative and the Council of Europe agree that Bosnia and Herzegovina's membership is not the responsibility of the International Community, but of the authorities of Bosnia and Herzegovina themselves.