

High Representative addresses the Political Affairs Committee of the Council of Europe

In Strasbourg today, the High Representative, Wolfgang Petritsch, delivered a speech to the Political Affairs Committee of the Council of Europe.

The High Representative made clear that he considers Bosnia and Herzegovina's accession to the Council of Europe to be of the utmost importance: it will be an crucial milestone on Bosnia and Herzegovina's road to Europe.

However, he is convinced that BiH should not accede until the preconditions set for accession are met. The main requirements are functioning state institutions, the adoption of the Election Law and respect for human rights and the Rule of Law. Only if more progress in these three fields is achieved, can Bosnia and Herzegovina join the Council of Europe and participate in its work as a respected and fully fledged member. It will have proven that it "accepts the principles of the Rule of Law and of the enjoyment by all members within its jurisdiction of human rights and fundamental freedoms," as the Statute of the Council of Europe demands from its members.

In line with the concept of Ownership, the primary responsibility for the meeting of these preconditions lies with the political leadership of this country. The preconditions are real; but with the right level of political will, the High Representative can see no reason why they should not be met at an early date.

As well as addressing the Political Affairs Committee, the High Representative also met with Hans-Peter Furrer, Director

General of Political Affairs at the Council of Europe; Lord Russel Johnston, President of the Parliamentary Assembly; the Bureau of Ministers' Deputies; Walter Schwimmer, Secretary General of the Council of Europe; and Terry Davis, Chairman of the Political Affairs Committee of the Parliamentary Assembly.