

The High Representative for Bosnia and Herzegovina, Ambassador Wolfgang Petritsch, addresses the Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council (EAPC) at Foreign Ministers level at NATO HQ, Brussels

Mister President, Secretary General, Excellencies,

It is a great honor and a timely opportunity for me to address you this morning – five years and one day after the Dayton Accords, ending the war in BiH, were signed in Paris.

There is a quickening of the tempo of affairs in Bosnia which we must respond to together if we are to capitalize on the progress of this year.

And I would like to say straight away that the presence of SFOR in Bosnia and Herzegovina remains of the utmost importance. I understand that all your governments are under pressure to ease the burden on military manpower. But all the efforts of civilian implementation in building a viable state based on a civil society in order to create sustainable conditions for peace in Bosnia and Herzegovina would be impossible without the presence of the NATO-led Stabilization Force.

Some in the international community have expressed disappointment with the results of the November general

elections, especially when they have in the back of their minds this year's dramatic changes in Croatia and Yugoslavia. Such comparisons are unfair to Bosnia and Herzegovina, a country that has been through a long and bloody war. A country whose situation is simply much more complex and where the "fear factor" can be much more easily exploited than elsewhere.

The mere figures do not justify the pessimism. The three main nationalist parties have seen their share in the 42-seat-strong state House of Representatives decline from 36 in 1996 to just 19 in these elections. The multi-ethnic Social Democratic Party, with nine seats, has now the strongest showing in the Assembly. This pattern is repeated with some variation in Bosnia and Herzegovina's two entities.

Very clearly there are positive changes in the political landscape of the country, but naturally they continue to evolve too slowly for many of us ...

Now we are already well into the post-election phase and I have made it clear from the beginning: regardless of which parties enter into government, the obligations and principles remain the same – full and swift implementation of the Dayton Accords, the PIC Brussels Ministerial Declaration, the EU Road Map and the conditions for Bosnia and Herzegovina's accession to the Council of Europe.

As a part of this, we will continue to push our three main priorities: economic reform, refugee return and the building of independent and effective state institutions.

As a part of consolidating the peace, I urge NATO members to continue their efforts to arrest people indicted for war crimes, in particular Karadzic and Mladic. Their continued presence poisons the peace in Bosnia and effectively prevents any reduction of the climate of fear. Bosnia and Herzegovina cannot turn to the future if has not dealt with its past. Here

too, SFOR plays a vital role.

Mister President, your Excellencies,

Let me now turn to defense and security reform: as in all other areas of implementation, we work on the basis of clear guidance from PIC.

The PIC implementation agenda is coordinated by my office and there is – albeit slow – progress. I am referring to the recent decision by the BiH Presidency to expand the state-level Standing Committee for Military Matters which exerts civilian control over the armed forces in BiH into a permanent staff. There is also clear progress in formulating the defense policy for the country. The first comprehensive version of this was completed just yesterday. And we are jointly working on substantial reductions in defense budgets: military expenditures in the entities are still at quite unaffordable levels.

COMSFOR – General Dodson – and I are in clear agreement on the evolutionary nature of the defense and security reform program. We are both aware how sensitively we have to move these issues forward if we are not to play into the hands of the extremists.

There can be no doubt, however, that we are putting every effort into establishing a single defense identity for Bosnia. Only this single defense identity will allow BiH to make further progress towards integration into the region and to wider European security and defense fields.

The dramatic changes in Croatia and Yugoslavia have created a completely different security environment for Bosnia and Herzegovina. We must lose no time in seizing this opportunity for sustainable and sensible changes in the BiH-internal defense landscape. Constructive support from Zagreb and eventually from Belgrade will be decisive in that undertaking.

Regional and international cooperation are the key words for a medium-term security strategy for the whole region. In this context, the valuable lessons from creating the Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council will – I am sure – shape future security concepts also for the Balkans.

Concrete ideas for the Bosnians to work on already are joint peacekeeping forces, inter-entity cooperation in mine clearing or the creation of an army staff college.

In our contacts with Bosnian politicians and senior officers, willingness to undertake such efforts is repeatedly expressed. Clearly, they want to become members of Partnership for Peace and to join Euro-Atlantic structures.

But in this area, like in so many others – Council of Europe accession or EU road map as examples –, the leaders of BiH still have to deliver convincing results. They need to start paying the political price and take tough decisions – otherwise all integrationist rhetoric will remain just that: rhetoric. The talk about regional security arrangements and Partnership for Peace are premature until the leaders of Bosnia and Herzegovina demonstrate their will to implement a Common Defense Policy for their country.

Mister President, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Let me close by emphasizing that I am – as I have been since my arrival in Sarajevo – determined to use my powers to the full to move the process forward. By the same token, however, I need to point out that in this area, it is only in a well-coordinated way that the international actors – SFOR, OSCE, UNMiBH, OHR guided by its Steering Board – can progress: this is an area which combines vital aspects of both civilian and military implementation. Together we are determined to pave the way for a single defense identity, progressive integration of the military structures in the country and prepare Bosnia and Herzegovina for full assimilation into the defense,

security and economic structures of the region and of Europe.