

Opening remarks by High Representative, Wolfgang Petritsch at the Stability Pact Working Table on Security Issues

Special Coordinator Hombach, Foreign Minister Prlic, Co-Chair Ambassador Turkovic, distinguished guests and delegates, I am glad to have the opportunity to make some opening remarks from the vantage point of my office.

During the past few weeks, along with other representatives from BiH and the International Community, I have to devote much time and thought to address the issue of security in BiH. This country cannot hope to develop and sustain a modern democratic framework if it does not have a viable and comprehensive security policy, based on the concept of balance and mutual confidence between the peoples of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Equally, from an external perspective, a credible security policy is one of the "door openers" for the future integration of BiH into European structures.

First, a word about force reductions, which I believe are central to any viable security policy. The 15% reductions agreed to by the Entity Armed Forces in 1999 were an important signal not just for BiH, but for the whole region. They will serve to reduce the inordinately high percentage of national resources devoted to defence spending, and they will stimulate thought and action on the re-direction of resources. In my view, there is room for additional force reductions, which is why I have invited the Presidency to commit to an additional 15% reduction. I am encouraged by the constructive and positive words and contributions of President Izetbegovic this morning, and I sincerely hope that the Presidency takes up this initiative in this international forum over the next two days. BiH can set an example for other South Eastern European nations to follow.

One of the key constitutional and institutional aspects of security in any country is the need to ensure that the armed forces are commanded by democratically elected representatives of the people. In the case of BiH, this principle of civilian command and control is clearly stated in the General Framework Agreement for Peace, and I have only recently reiterated this fact to the Presidency. In short, no nation within South Eastern Europe can hope to be seriously considered for membership of Euro-Atlantic structures if they do not adhere to this principle.

Second, Judicial Reform. Respect for the Rule of Law is obviously vital to security, and we at the OHR continue to promote it vigorously in BiH. The goal is a fully functional, independent and effective judicial system, without which there can be no long term sustainable economic development, no effective domestic protection of human rights, no assurance of law and order.

Laws designed to depoliticize the process of selecting judges, which were drafted with the assistance of the International Community here, are currently pending before the Entities' legislative assemblies. Last summer, the OHR imposed legislation establishing a Federation Supreme Court, and expanded the Federation Prosecutor's Office. Certain categories of crimes, notably organized crime, are now dealt with at Federation, not Cantonal, level, with the aim of eliminating politically motivated court decisions. Meanwhile, a Commission on inter-entity legal cooperation has been established; a common code of ethics for judges and prosecutors has been adopted; and we are pushing hard for the setting up of bodies to train the judiciary.

These are only some of the judicial reforms that are either pending or have already been established. But I must also mention – although many of you perhaps already know – that I have also recently imposed legislation creating a State Border Service, without which the people of BiH will never feel properly secure as citizens of this state.

At the same time, we are working to eliminate corruption, still a major impediment to the transition to a fully democratic society. Last September I established the Anti Corruption and Transparency (ACT) Group, in an effort to streamline and reinvigorate the IC's anti-corruption efforts. True change, however, must come from within; which is why I welcome BiH's readiness to accede to the Criminal Law Convention on Corruption, GRECO (Group of States against Corruption) and other international instruments, as well as their participation in all anti-corruption efforts within the framework of the Stability Pact.

The wider public, too, need to come to a better understanding of the nature and extent of corruption in BiH society. A public awareness campaign on this issue is already under way. And yesterday, as you are probably aware, we organized the first BiH Anti-Corruption and Transparency Conference, which was attended by over 200 people from

throughout the state of BiH, representing all three levels of government, the judiciary, the police, NGOs, civil society and the media.

As you can see from all this activity, security issues are central to the International Community's efforts here in BiH. And I make no apologies for what may seem like parochial remarks, because I do believe that they have relevance for the entire region.

The experience of BiH can set an example for its regional neighbors; and your efforts and willingness to develop cooperation on a regional basis will help to prepare for greater involvement in European institutions, both military and civil.

At the same time, BiH's work on security issues will not have the impact that it could if neighboring countries do not take similar measures. On the question of security, BiH cannot operate in a vacuum: it is very much a part of the region, and on this issue in particular it must be seen as such.

I seriously hope the people of BiH will take the opportunity that the Stability Pact represents for their future, and I wish you a most successful conference here today and tomorrow.