Article by the High Representative, Paddy Ashdown:”Collateral Costs in Fighting a New Court”

SARAJEVO, Bosnia-Herzegovina – Since taking over the job of leading the peace process in Bosnia and Herzegovina a month ago, I’ve been struck by two things: how much has been achieved since the war and how much work remains. That work could soon become a lot more difficult.

Why? Unless the United Nations mandate for Bosnia and Herzegovina is renewed by the Security Council by tomorrow – which depends on the Bush administration rescinding the veto it issued on Sunday – the international community will have to revise its strategy for helping this country. We all want success here in Bosnia and Herzegovina, no country more so than the United States. But a failure to renew the United Nations mandate will put that success a little further away, particularly in terms of law-enforcement training that is central to removing terrorists and organized crime from Bosnia.

The reasons for the disagreement in New York have nothing to do with Bosnia. (American troops will remain here as part of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization’s military stabilization force – at 18,000 members, a much larger group than the United Nations’ 1,500-person contingent, of which just 46 are American.) The Security Council quarrel over the International Criminal Court is not a matter for my office, but the consequences of a failure to agree on a way forward are.

Should the mandate not be extended, the United Nations mission

in Bosnia and Herzegovina would have to pull out. That mission has a particular responsibility for training local police forces so they serve all the communities of this country impartially. This is a vital part of bringing law and order back to a war-torn country and giving refugees the confidence to return to the houses they were forced out of by paramilitary thugs.

Early withdrawal of the United Nations mission would rush the transition from the International Police Task Force to the European Union police mission, scheduled for the end of this year, and make it much harder to achieve the next stage in our work with the police here: tackling organized crime.

The fight against organized crime is at the top of the international agenda for Bosnia and Herzegovina. Sixty percent of the drugs entering Western Europe pass through the Balkans. Tens of thousands of illegal immigrants also come this way. There is evidence that organized crime syndicates and terrorist organizations exploit the absence of law and order by operating out of Bosnia.

If we see our job through properly, I see no reason for the international community to remain here for another seven years. We have achieved a huge amount since the war ended. Today, more than 850,000 refugees and displaced persons have registered as residents in the municipalities they were forced to flee during the war. Significant progress has been made in professionalizing the armed forces and the police. Work has begun on implementing a nationwide education syllabus that turns schools into places of reconciliation rather than nationalist indoctrination. There is a stable currency, almost no inflation and a profitable commercial banking system. Gross domestic product in 2000 and 2001 grew by around 5 percent, despite a decline in aid flows.

My goal here is to wind down the interventionist peace-building process of the postwar years, with its major North

Atlantic Treaty Organization military component, and to help bring about a more normal presence based on extensive engagement by the European Union and private investors. In a few years' time there will be no more need for soldiers and international bureaucrats like me. Instead, I hope Sarajevo will be full of bankers and businessmen, the sort of people we increasingly see in all the other capitals of southeastern and central Europe.

A successful and prosperous country, increasingly integrated into Europe: This is the future for Bosnia and Herzegovina. But it will only arrive if we in the international community see the job through.

Paddy Ashdown, former head of the Liberal Democrat party in Britain, is high representative of the international community in Bosnia and responsible for implementation of the Dayton peace accords.