

Bas-Backer: Enlargement Fatigue Greatest Threat

The greatest long-term threat to stability in the Western Balkans is less likely to come from any residual fall-out from the break-up of Yugoslavia than from enlargement fatigue among older EU member states, the Senior Deputy High Representative, Peter Bas-Backer, told a conference in Brussels today.

"The malevolent *dramatis personae* that made the wars of Yugoslav succession have long since left the stage, and the international ineptitude and incoherence that made those wars so much worse have been remedied," Ambassador Bas-Backer said.

"As of January, four historically 'Balkan' states will be EU members. The rest have the much-vaunted and genuinely popular 'European perspective' to keep them peaceable and on track with the sort of thoroughgoing reforms they need to make."

However, addressing the European Balkan Partners' Policy Summit organised by Friends of Europe, a Brussels-based non-governmental organisation, Ambassador Bas-Backer emphasised that the pace of these positive developments needs to be maintained against a backdrop of diminishing European enthusiasm for expansion – the door to enlargement will not remain open indefinitely.

This was particularly pertinent in regard to Bosnia and Herzegovina, he said, where the reform and European integration agenda were brought to a standstill ahead of the October elections and have not since been revived.

Ambassador Bas-Backer noted, however, that: "Once Romania and Bulgaria have been absorbed, the other and much smaller candidates and would-be candidates should not challenge the European Union's digestive system too fundamentally,"

enhancing their prospects for eventual integration.

He concluded by expressing the hope that once any regional turbulence arising from the resolution of Kosovo's final status has subsided, Southeast Europe will once again be able to focus fully on its European integration path.

The full text of SDHR Bas-Backer's speech can be accessed at www.ohr.int