

BiH Making Important Progress: Momentum of Reform Must Be Maintained

“Peace in Bosnia and Herzegovina is becoming increasingly entrenched thanks to the courage of BiH citizens and the firm and continuing engagement of the International Community, in which the US is a key partner,” High Representative Paddy Ashdown said this afternoon during a meeting in Sarajevo with US Secretary of State Colin Powell.

The High Representative welcomed the US 's continuing role in helping to drive forward core reforms in the financial, defence and intelligence sectors – reforms that are necessary to make BiH a stable, viable, peaceful, multiethnic state. These reforms have already made BiH a serious candidate for the start of Stabilisation and Association Agreement negotiations with the European Union and an invitation from NATO to join the Partnership for Peace program.

The High Representative also briefed Secretary Powell on recent political developments, and the Secretary of State welcomed the start of the process to modernise BiH's police forces through the Police Reform Commission.

“Building up the recently reformed Intelligence Service (OSA), the State Information and Protection Service (SIPA) and the Security and Justice Ministries must be our focus now,” the High Representative said. “The laws are in place, but these must now be implemented. Agencies and ministries must be staffed and fully functioning, if BiH is to show it is capable of tackling organised crime and resisting the global threat of terrorism.” The Secretary of State and the High Representative agreed that implementing these core reforms, must not be allowed to fall behind schedule.

Both the Secretary of State and the High Representative noted the obligation of all BiH authorities, including the RS, to fully cooperate with the International Criminal Tribunal in The Hague . The High Representative said, “this is an issue upon which BiH’s future depends”, adding that both NATO and the EU have “publicly called for full co-operation with the ICTY from the RS authorities.”

The High Representative and Secretary Powell agreed that through a unified effort the US and the EU will continue to support BiH on it’s road to European integration, but that BiH’s legislature and executive must show that they are worthy of the people’s trust.