

Emerging Consensus a Positive First Step



The Peace Implementation Council has maintained a unanimous view of the way forward for Bosnia and Herzegovina, High Representative and EU Special Representative Miroslav Lajčák told senior European Union officials today.

The HR/EUSR was briefing the EU's Political and Security Committee on overall progress in BiH and on the conclusions of the PIC Steering Board meeting earlier in the week.

He said the PIC recognized that the consensus reached by leaders of the SDA, SNSD and HDZ on 8 November was "a positive first step" that "offers the potential, if there is the political will, to rapidly address the objectives and conditions" set for a transition from the OHR to the future EUSR office.

The HR/EUSR noted that "we still need to see what the legislative detail will be," but he welcomed what he said was an "emerging consensus" among BiH political leaders.

He also drew attention to a commitment made earlier this month by the three Prime Ministers to coordinate more effectively on EU-related issues. He said this "should contribute to the improvement of the political atmosphere in the country."

At the same time, the HR/ESR gave a frank assessment of the damage inflicted on BiH's European integration prospects and postwar recovery by recent destructive and divisive rhetoric. "The overall political situation continues to be fragile," he said, "and the few positive steps we have seen in the last

weeks can easily be unraveled with new negative rhetoric and unilateral actions by any of the political leaders.”

Noting the PIC conclusion that there has not yet been sufficient progress on 5 objectives and 2 conditions to justify closing the OHR, the HR/EUSR said the PIC had underlined the importance of resolving issues related to state and defense property and the future status of the Brcko. “It agreed to strongly engage on both these issues in the weeks and months to come, in support of the OHR, in order to reach solutions by spring,” he said, adding that this “is a prerequisite which all PIC Steering Board members accepted.”

The HR/EUSR said the OHR would continue to carry out its mandate into 2009 and that its future would be considered by the PIC when it meets on 25 and 26 March next year. “What is clear is that further concrete progress will be required before the PIC can decide on the transition from the OHR to the EUSR. This is in particular the view of the non-EU PIC member countries,” he said.

He welcomed the international community’s refocused attention on BiH, and he called on the EU to step up preparations for its broadened responsibilities when the OHR is closed and superseded by the EUSR. He welcomed the EUs willingness to retain a military force in BiH and the recent conclusion of the General Affairs Council that any change in EUFOR’s deployment must “take into account the political situation on the ground.”

“The closure of the OHR has been on the agenda for the last two years, but it is now a real and present prospect,” the HR/EUSR said. “It is important that we start concretely planning and determining without delay how our reinforced EU engagement would be implemented and what a reinforced EUSR office will look like.”