

High Representative addresses EU's General Affairs Council

Today the High Representative, Wolfgang Petritsch, addressed the General Affairs Council of the European Union (EU). He briefed the foreign ministers of the 15 EU member states on the peace process in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) and the strategic priorities he has proposed to be endorsed at the Conference of the Peace Implementation Council (PIC) on Tuesday and Wednesday.

The High Representative stressed the need for continuing support to the peace process, in particular by the EU, adding that it was however clear that financial support would decrease and more constructive engagement and commitment was required from the domestic authorities in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Elaborating on his three strategic priorities – economic reforms, return of displaced people and refugees and functioning Common Institutions -, Ambassador Petritsch said that in the light of diminishing donors' funds, it was imperative that BiH made the change from an aid-driven to an investment-driven economy. He said this required substantial economic reforms in BiH to create a business-friendly environment, and the removal of all obstacles to a single economic space. "The people of BiH need to wake up and ask for solutions to the real issues: jobs, housing, education," the High Representative said.

With regards to the return process, Ambassador Petritsch said he was encouraged by the minority return figures for the first months of this year. He said this issue had a "toxic effect on the political discourse" in BiH and had to be resolved at last. The High Representative also appealed to the foreign ministers to provide flexible funding to support spontaneous

returns.

Lastly, the Ambassador emphasised the need for functioning Common Institutions so that BiH could meet the needs of its citizens and become a reliable partner in international relations.

The High Representative closed by saying that the fact that the PIC Conference would be held in Brussels at the invitation of the Portuguese EU Presidency, the EU's High Representative for Common Foreign and Security Policy, Javier Solana, and the European Commissioner for External relations, Chris Patten, was of symbolic importance and illustrated the growing role of the EU in the politics of South Eastern Europe.