

High Representative addresses North Atlantic Council on regional security

The High Representative, Wolfgang Petritsch, today addressed members of the North Atlantic Council in Brussels, including NATO Secretary-General Lord Roberston, by video-link to support the case for the continued presence of SFOR, the NATO-led peacekeeping force, here in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

All NATO member states are under pressure to cut defence spending. But the High Representative underlined that SFOR's presence in BiH remains vital as the country has only just started to turn the corner nearly five years after the Dayton Peace Accords were signed. SFOR, with a force of 22,000, is now at a third of its original strength – this is the minimum number needed to keep the peace in BiH.

The High Representative said that despite the encouraging numbers of refugee returns this year, there were still many tough and difficult tasks ahead which could threaten the country's fragile stability. The elections crisis in the neighbouring Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and upcoming elections in BiH itself on November 11 serve to further highlight SFOR's crucial role in BiH, no matter that the country now features less in international news headlines.

The High Representative added that SFOR's involvement remains essential in the area of military reform in both Entities and continues to play a leading role in the capture of indicted war criminals.