

High Representative Overturns Council of Ministers' BiH Court Suspension

The High Representative, Paddy Ashdown, today issued a Decision confirming the Council of Ministers' original decision of 10 October this year allocating the former "Victor Bubanj" JNA barracks, as the seat of the BiH Court. The High Representative's Decision means that the BiH Court will be located in these barracks.

Issuing this Decision, the High Representative said; "I believe if crimes were indeed committed in the Viktor Bubanj/Ramiz Salcin barracks during the war, this strengthens the case for giving this building to an institution whose function will be to protect individual human rights and punish these most heinous crimes. The sooner BiH has a functioning State Court, the sooner the citizens of BiH will have the assurance of justice they deserve, with legal protection at the highest levels. Setting up the State Court is a crucial part of the reforms necessary to put in place a justice system capable of dealing with the most serious crimes, including organised crime and corruption. For these reasons I have taken the decision to go ahead with establishing the State Court in these former barracks, as was originally agreed by the Council of Ministers".

The search for suitable premises to house the BiH Court, with over 100 staff, including Judges, a Prosecutor's Office, Administrative Staff, Court Police and other security staff, has been underway for two years. The importance of the Court, and the size of staff, have meant that a minimum working space of 4,000 m² is needed. In addition, security arrangements have had to be taken into consideration. Other possible locations have been considered by both the BiH Institutions and the

International Community, but have either failed to meet requirements, or would need extensive and expensive remodelling work. The former Victor Bubanj, barracks have the added advantage of being designed and built specifically as a court. The European Commission has already agreed to invest 2 million Euros in the adaptation and renovation work required at the Victor Bubanj site.

The Office of the High Representative will be in contact with the International Criminal Tribunal for War Crimes Committed in the Former Yugoslavia (ICTY), and Entity authorities responsible for war crimes investigation to gather further information on the accusations that have been brought forward in connection with these premises. The High Representative has also called on all those with information regarding war crimes to co-operate fully with the ICTY.