

High Representative reiterates call for BiH accession to the Council of Europe

The High Representative, Wolfgang Petritsch, has identified substantial progress in Bosnia and Herzegovina's efforts to become a member of the Council of Europe, and has made the case for BiH's speedy accession to the organisation. In the course of extensive consultations this week, the High Representative has written to Walter Schwimmer, General Secretary of the Council of Europe, and has spoken with Lord Russell-Johnston, President of the Parliamentary Assembly. In his letter to Mr Schwimmer, the High Representative expressed the hope that since Bosnia and Herzegovina has now fulfilled a significant portion of Council of Europe membership criteria, including the passage of the Election Law, its application for membership will be considered quickly and it will soon be invited to join the organisation.

The adoption of the Election Law satisfies one of the long-standing requirements set by the International Community. It not only fills a significant gap in the democratic system of Bosnia and Herzegovina, but also shows that the newly elected authorities are ready to make realistic and principled compromises on essential matters.

The High Representative believes the stage has now been reached where the conditions that remain unfulfilled can be included in the list of post-accession criteria. It remains a matter of the utmost urgency for Bosnia and Herzegovina to address human rights issues, so that the rights to which BiH

citizens are entitled under the European Convention for Human Rights are fully secured. These rights include the right to return. Strengthening the state institutions, harmonising the education systems and creating an independent judiciary are also still very much part of the core agenda for the country.