High Representative Urges Politicians to Speed Up Reforms on Justice and Jobs

The High Representative, Paddy Ashdown, addressed a joint session of the BiH House of Representatives and House of Peoples early on Tuesday afternoon and called on parliamentarians to pass necessary laws to promote the rule of law and economic recovery.

The High Representative spoke for 15 minutes, and then spent an hour answering deputies' questions. This format was chosen as the best means of developing an effective partnership with the parliamentarians.

The High Representative noted that a new sense of purpose is discernible throughout the region, as countries focus their efforts on securing greater integration in the European mainstream. He said that yesterday's Summit between the presidency of BiH and the presidents of Croatia and Yugoslavia reflected this.

However, this sense of purpose has yet to become universally apparent in the conduct of day-to-day politics. The High Representative cited the proposal by Federation parliamentarians to increase war veterans' benefits despite the fact that funds for the proposed increase do not exist and despite the fact that the IMF is threatening to withdraw more than US$100 million in loans for this year if the budget-busting proposal wins parliamentary approval.

"It would be hard to imagine a section of society that has sacrificed more for their country than the veterans," the High Representative said, but "when aid is falling and debts are mounting" the attempt to boost veterans' pensions could lead to bankruptcy. This would cause suffering for the entire

population – including veterans. The High Representative said that the proposed legislation would also wreck BiH's relationship with the IMF and scare away other international financial institutions.

Overdue items of legislation which the High Representative urged deputies to pass without further delay include the Law on the Special Chamber in the BiH Court, and Special Departments to Combat Organised Crime, the State Veterinary Law (which will eventually enable BiH farmers to sell their produce in the EU) the Law on Concessions, the Law on Registration of Legal Persons, and the Law on Statistics. The High Representative also called for swift approval of the PBS Law, the eighteenth and final piece of legislation on the EU Road Map. Passage of this law, which will give legal protection to free and fair media in BiH, will open the way for BiH to begin negotiating a stabilization and association agreement with the European Union.

The High Representative will address the RSNA, on 26 July, and the Federation Parliament, on 30 July.