

High Representative welcomes vote of Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly

In Strasbourg today, the High Representative, Wolfgang Petritsch, welcomed the vote of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (CoE), recommending to the CoE's Committee of Ministers that Bosnia and Herzegovina's application for CoE membership be approved. Bosnia and Herzegovina's accession to the Council will establish a new international partnership in sharing the values – fundamental human rights, the rule of law, the centrality of individual freedoms – for which the Council of Europe stands. It will also take Bosnia and Herzegovina's integration in the family of European states a significant step forward, the High Representative said.

In his address to the Parliamentary Assembly, the High Representative called for a positive vote, stressing that Bosnia and Herzegovina has moved measurably closer in the last year to the norms expected of Council of Europe members. Establishing rule of law and respect for the rights of each and every citizen has been at the heart of Bosnia and Herzegovina's postwar recovery, the High Representative said. He referred to progress made during the last two years in enforcing the right of refugees and displaced persons to go back to their homes – in many cases to areas which just two years ago were regarded as nationalist strongholds. The High Representative also stressed the positive role of the Alliance for Change, especially in passing the Election Law and thereby clearing an important hurdle on the road to Council of Europe membership.

In his speech to the Assembly the High Representative reminded

delegates that Bosnia and Herzegovina is still in a period of double transition, from war to peace, and from a Communist system to a market democracy. He noted that, with a credible currency and a basically free market, Bosnia and Herzegovina is about to establish the foundations of a modern economy. Although every single condition attached to membership of the Council of Europe has not been fulfilled, the High Representative expressed his confidence that the remaining tasks will be completed.

Accession to the Council of Europe, the High Representative said, will cement Bosnia and Herzegovina's European perspective. It will give the progressive forces in the country the support they have a right to expect from their partners in the rest of Europe.