

# High Representative's Message to Leaders of BiH

The Peace Implementation Council Political Directors are gathering in Sarajevo over the next two days. They will assess whether BiH is moving seriously down the road of reform. In particular, they will be briefed on the progress – or lack of it – in the defence reform process, and will report back to Washington, Brussels, London, Paris, Berlin, Moscow and the other capitals of the PIC countries accordingly.

“The next few hours and days will be crucial for the future of BiH. More than just BiH's credibility is at stake,” the High Representative, Paddy Ashdown said in a message to the political leaders of BiH.

“If you, the leaders of BiH, accept the Defence Reform Commission's proposals, you will open the door to BiH becoming a credible candidate for NATO's PfP. If you reject these reform proposals, you will set this country back maybe for many years. The choice is yours. I cannot do this for you. BiH cannot get to NATO or Europe through the Office of the High Representative,” the High Representative said.

He has repeated that it would be tragedy for BiH if it rejected this historic opportunity to join NATO's PfP and he said that he passionately believes membership of first PfP and then NATO offers the best possible chance of lasting peace and security for the citizens of this country.

“It is no exaggeration to say that the future of the children of Bosnia and Herzegovina depends on the decisions you will take in the coming hours and days”, he said. “You may have concerns about the proposals. You may want further clarification. In which case, let the Commission complete its work so these proposals can be considered in the democratic

institutions of this country, in government and in parliament. If you have concerns, my message is this: Trust the Democratic Process. Give Parliament a chance.”

The High Representative concluded his message with a call to the leaders of BiH to “consider what is at stake; consider the price that BiH will pay if you fail to back reform; and make the right choice, in the interests of BiH, and in the interests of all her citizens.”