

High Representative's press conference following the Peace Implementation Council's session



Brussels, 27 February 2007 at 16:00

The Peace Implementation Council has just completed its meeting and the communiqué is available to you in English. A translation is also being prepared that will be sent out electronically to media and placed on the OHR web site as soon as possible.

As I indicated earlier, our discussions, both this morning and yesterday evening, were constructive. In this way, a general consensus eventually emerged around the assessment I put to the PIC.

When the decision was originally taken in June of last year to close the OHR at the end of June this year, it was subject to “review and confirmation” early this year.

As you are all no doubt aware, I was proposing a one-year extension to the mandate of the OHR based on my analysis of the situation.

In its deliberations, yesterday and today, the PIC Steering Board took into account and assessed carefully both the situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina and in the wider region on

the basis of the analysis that I presented. Following careful consideration, the PIC Steering Board endorsed my position and decided against confirming OHR closure.

This means that the OHR will remain in place and continue to carry out its mandate under the Dayton Peace Agreement, ensuring full respect of the Peace Agreement.

The PIC Steering Board agreed to work for the closure of the OHR by 30 June 2008 and to review the situation at its meetings in October 2007 and February 2008.

I should make clear, however, that transition remains the goal. Indeed, the PIC Steering Board reaffirmed that it is in the interest of all for Bosnia and Herzegovina to take full responsibility for its own affairs and that the policy of ownership remains the guiding principle.

The transition timeframe agreed last year was clearly ambitious, given that it was an election year in Bosnia and Herzegovina and that key decisions needed to be made elsewhere in the region.

Clearly, there has been progress in the intervening period. Elections took place that were entirely organised by the authorities of Bosnia and Herzegovina and governments have been formed without the explicit involvement of the international community for the first time.

The security situation has continued to improve and remains stable.

And the economy continues to grow at around 5 per cent a year.

Politically, however, the authorities of Bosnia and Herzegovina have yet to rise to the challenge of ownership. In addition, the regional situation remains potentially volatile.

Under such circumstances, maintaining the OHR is both the most prudent and most responsible policy for now.

The process of transition will not be as quick as we had anticipated in June last year, but transition remains the goal and the OHR will focus its efforts on completing the transition to full ownership during the extension period.

PIC Political Directors made clear that the international community would continue to help Bosnia and Herzegovina to make the final steps from peace implementation to Euro-Atlantic integration as quickly as possible.

We heard today from Council of Ministers Chairman, Nikola Spiric, who outlined his government's programme.

Prime Minister Spiric's programme is ambitious and puts the preconditions for the signing of a Stabilisation and Association Agreement with the European Union at the top of the agenda.

The PIC Steering Board underlined the importance of an SAA and urged political leaders to meet the requirements for its signing, in particular agreement on police reform implementation and timelines, as soon as possible.

PIC Political Directors warned that missing March deadlines on such an agreement risked significant delay in the signing of an SAA and welcomed my offer to facilitate agreement.

In this way, I, too, will be focusing on the preconditions for an SAA in my remaining time as High Representative and EU Special Representative as well as on taking the constitutional reform process forward.