

High Representative's statement following the meeting of the Peace Implementation Council

Good afternoon. Thank you all for coming, on what is an important day for Bosnia and Herzegovina.

We have had extremely constructive talks during the past two days, both here at the Office of the High Representative and in the Parliament building.

I am deliberately speaking to you in front of the Office of the High Representative together with the political directors of the PIC Steering Board countries.

I am doing this because we have decided to close the Office of the High Representative.

The Office of the High Representative will close on 30 June next year and preparations for closure will start immediately. There will be a final review of the situation to confirm this in or around February 2007.

In the course of the past 11-and-a-half years, this institution has achieved an enormous amount. Here, I must pay tribute to all who have worked for it.

I must pay tribute to the staff – international staff but in particular the Bosnians and Herzegovinians, who have given so much over the years and whose commitment, dedication and expertise have helped bring Bosnia and Herzegovina to its present promising situation.

Today, the nature of the International Community's involvement in Bosnia and Herzegovina must change as the country moves

from peace implementation to Euro-Atlantic integration.

This is a road that goes from Dayton, via Sarajevo, Banja Luka, and Mostar, as well as every city, town and village in Bosnia and Herzegovina – to Brussels.

The closure of the Office of the High Representative does not mean that the International Community is withdrawing from Bosnia and Herzegovina . Far from it.

The International Community will remain fully engaged with a reinforced engagement by the European Union and the continued presence of EUFOR, the EU Police Mission, NATO and other international actors.

And I will remain the EU Special Representative, continuing the work of coordinating the activities of the International Community, facilitating progress and advising the BiH authorities.

But the International Community engagement is changing and it is changing in a fundamental way.

What does this mean for the people of Bosnia and Herzegovina?

It means opportunity.

Now is the time to seize the opportunity and take full ownership of this country's destiny.

The October elections will offer citizens the direct means to do this.

Between now and October, citizens must judge candidates on clear criteria.

Can they solve problems or are they more likely to create them?

Let me say it again – the International Community will stay engaged; the International Community wants to work with BiH

partners to forward an ambitious reform agenda that will bring benefits to the people of this country and move Bosnia and Herzegovina further along the path of Euro-Atlantic integration.

Citizens must ask – is this or that politician *for* this agenda or *against* it?

Easy enough to get a sense of where politicians stand – simply observe which ones work over the summer to bring about progress on

- enacting the Higher Education Law
- enacting the Law on Obligations
- enacting the Pharmaceuticals Law
- ensuring centralisation of banking supervision
- resolving the dispute over revenue allocation
- advancing PBS reform
- advancing police reform

In our discussions today we also dealt with the need for full cooperation with the ICTY, and full implementation of BiH Human Rights Chamber Decisions. This issue isn't going to go away.

The message to BiH political leaders from the PIC today is I think very simple:

Work With Us!

There are pressing issues that affect the livelihood of the citizens of BiH – issues of employment and social services and educational opportunities.

Deal with these issues through reforms. We will help you.

BiH's borders are settled and its internal organisation will only change following agreement by all its constituent peoples. The task of political leaders is to make this reality positive – by creating jobs and improving living standards.

The message from today's PIC is that we will work willingly with all BiH partners who wish to take this agenda forward.

Thank you