

High Representative Calls On PRC To Eradicate Politics From Police Reform

Speaking this morning at the start of the final Police Restructuring Commission (PRC) session – which is due to run until Wednesday this week – the High Representative, Paddy Ashdown, said “the PRC’s task is unambiguous; to create a single police system, free from political interference, capable of serving the citizen and taking on criminals from low-level car thieves to organized, international networks”.

Commenting on public’s view of the quality of service that the Police structures in BiH provide the High Representative said “More than half of those who had themselves been a victim of crime were unsatisfied with the police response. Over 80% in both the RS and the Federation believe that criminals get away with their crimes and 87% feel that politicians should do more to make the police more effective”. “They know what most of the professionals in this room know: That the fight between the police and the criminals is not a fair fight. That the deck is stacked in favour on lawbreakers, not law enforcers. That the system doesn’t work,” he added.

Police reform is one of the 16 pre-requirements for BiH’s accession to the EU. The High Representative reminded members of the PRC that the European Commission clearly stated its requirement as “a single structure of policing with competency vested at the state level operating in functional areas based on technical policing criteria”. Expecting this to change, when the European Commission’s functional review found BiH’s police forces to be “divided, over staffed, under-resourced, and unable to operate across the IEHL” is unrealistic and undermines the EU integration process.

The High Representative underlined that the fractured system of BiH's crime fighting structures are juxtaposed with the unity of BiH's "criminal space" and expressed his disappointment with the politicisation of the PRC debate process which is aimed at effectively providing one of the most basic public services – public security. "Moreover, without this kind of reform and a truly effective policing system it is impossible to expect a liberalisation of visa regimes for BiH citizens" said the High Representative.

"The three tenets of police reform; state level authority for all budgetary and legislative policing matters, functional police areas of responsibility and police operations free from political interference are fundamental European principals" said the High Representative. "BiH's citizens want to see the police tackling drug dealers, smugglers and car thieves who operate freely in the current fractured police system". The High Representative adding that "police professionals recognise the shortcomings of the system and that reform would mean better access to modern law enforcement methods and technologies so making solving crimes easier. They recognise that morale in the police service has never been lower and that reform also means better salaries, benefits, training, and career prospects."

The High Representative established PRC on 5 July this year, mandating it to propose a single structure of policing capable of fighting crime in BiH more effectively before the end of the year.