Statement by EC Commissioner Rehn on the police reform negotiations in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH), following his meeting with the European Union Special Representative Paddy Ashdown

I have been informed that the institutional negotiations on police reform will resume next Monday. I believe that we are now arriving at the crucial moment of these negotiations.

Police reform is the last big pending issue to recommend the opening of negotiations for a Stabilisation and Association Agreement (SAA). The outcome of these negotiations will decide whether BiH keeps the pace with the rest of the region.

There should be no misunderstanding. There are three basic principles that are not negotiable and that must be respected: 1) securing the exclusive state-level competences on police, 2) the elimination of political interference from police and 3) ensuring that police regions are determined on the basis of technical and professional criteria.

Any proposal for police reform has to meet these principles. I understand that the proposal prepared by the BiH State-level authorities and currently on the negotiating table would meet them.

If SAA negotiations are to be opened before the end of 2005, then agreement on police restructuring is needed as a matter of urgency.

Police reform is not a threat to the future of the Entities, which are guaranteed under Dayton. On the contrary, it is an opportunity to ensure a more secure and

prosperous environment for all citizens in BiH and a significant step forward towards BiH European future.

The time of delaying is over. All energies should now be devoted to define a sound and workable agreement, so that BiH’s European perspective does not suffer further delays.