

OHR's Statement at the International Agencies' Joint Press Conference in Banja Luka

Progress To SAA a Clear Indication of Change In IC Engagement

The BiH House of Representatives will vote tomorrow on the Agreement on Police Reform. BiH's Parliamentarians by seizing this opportunity and showing their commitment to Europe can take a major step towards a new political reality in BiH.

By proving their commitment to a functioning and European BiH, this country's parliamentarians can trigger a change in the engagement of the International Community here . Having moved into a contractual relationship with the EU, BiH will have shown that it is moving to a period where it no longer needs the current heavyweight foreign presence in the country.

There is a firm hope that by the end of next year the OHR could transform into an EU led mission. This could happen as early as the next elections, in October 2006.

Adopting this agreement will open the way for the launch of SAA negotiations and put BiH on the road to the EU – a road already taken by Serbia and Montenegro and all the other countries in the region.

The PIC last week affirmed that this process of transition is tied to actual progress in BiH, and that one clear indication to the Steering Board that BiH is indeed firmly on the road to Europe will be when it has qualified for negotiations on a Stabilisation and Association Agreement with the EU.

This agreement does not undermine the rights of any of BiH

Peoples . What it will do is lead to a much more effective policing system and , through closer EU association , to prosperity, security and stability.

This agreement will provide the people of BiH with policing based on the three principles laid down by the European Commission.

- No political interference with operational policing
- All legislative and budgetary competencies for all police matters must be vested at the State level.
- Functional local police areas must be determined by technical policing criteria, where operational command is exercised at the local level.

This means that there will be only one Ministry of Interior at the State level; no Ministries at lower levels and Police regions will be based on technical criteria, not on political criteria, which means that in the few areas necessary, they will cross the IEBL.

The OHR calls on all BiH parliamentarians to endorse this agreement and open the way for the launch of SAA talks and for the establishment of a modern, democratic and efficient single structure of police in BiH.