

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

Historic Day for Bosnia and Herzegovina

Today is a historic day for Bosnia and Herzegovina. It is both the anniversary of the signing in Paris of the General Framework Agreement for Peace that ended the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina and now the day that Bosnia and Herzegovina signs the Partnership-for-Peace framework document and joins NATO's Partnership-for-Peace Programme.

The High Representative and EU Special Representative, Christian Schwarz-Schilling, lobbied hard for Bosnia and Herzegovina to be admitted into the Partnership for Peace and was delighted to learn of the invitation at NATO's Riga Summit at the end of last month.

Mr Schwarz-Schilling considers PfP membership to be both a reward for successful defence reform and a critical step on Bosnia and Herzegovina's path to Euro-Atlantic integration. On this historic day, he again extends his congratulations to Bosnia and Herzegovina and, in particular, its defence establishment and urges the authorities to rise to the challenge of PfP membership.

Admittance into the PfP should not be viewed as the end but as the beginning of a process. PfP membership brings with it additional responsibilities and obligations. As the Peace Implementation Council pointed out last week, it is now even more important that the authorities of Bosnia and Herzegovina, especially in Republika Srpska, meet their international and Dayton obligations to cooperate fully with the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia. Moreover, the defence reform process must continue.

PfP membership is also the first step on the road to eventual NATO membership. This is an opportunity that Bosnia and Herzegovina must seize.

Palic Progress

At successive meetings the Peace Implementation Council has noted the RS's breach of its

fundamental requirement to meet its obligations to implement Human Rights Chamber/Commission Decisions in regard to the case of Avdo Palic.

The Office of the High Representative welcomes news that the Commission set up to establish the truth about the fate of Avdo Palic has been reactivated following a meeting yesterday between the Prime Minister of Republika Srpska, Milorad Dodik, and Avdo Palic's widow, Esma.

The OHR expects that this new initiative will finally uncover the whereabouts of the mortal remains of Avdo Palic.