

Statement: High Representative Addresses First DRC Session of 2005

Addressing the first session of the Defence Reform Commission under its new mandate today, the High Representative, Paddy Ashdown, welcomed the continuation of Defence Reform in BiH, noting that the DRC's achievements to date have already made BiH a credible candidate for NATO's Partnership for Peace, and that the success of this approach "has served as a model for the overall reform programme in BiH."

Defence reform is an ongoing process, which will modernize BiH's defence institutions and bring them in to line with standards set by NATO for PFP, and creating professional armed forces, the High Representative said. The reform is also designed to address the systemic weaknesses in BiH's law enforcement and security institutions that has for the past nine years obstructed BiH's co-operation with the ICTY.

The DRC in 2003 recommended looking beyond Partnership for Peace towards a clear commitment to achieving NATO membership in the future. The mandate given to the DRC on 31 December 2004 by the High Representative will help accelerate this process and means that by the end of this year both Entity Ministries of Defence will cease to exist, and their functions will be carried out by the State.

The High Representative warned of the ever-increasing budget deficits being run up by the Entities. This debt could reach crippling levels during the next year. Given the level of defence spending approved by parliaments in BiH this year, it is clear BiH cannot afford three ministries of defence or three general staffs. In this context the Defence Reform Commission's job is more crucial than ever.