

High Representative Comments on Resignation of Mirko Sarovic from BiH Presidency

The Orah Arms-to-Iraq affair has done more damage to BiH's international reputation than any other event since the end of the war, High Representative Paddy Ashdown said today. The High Representative was speaking to reporters following the announcement by Mirko Sarovic that he has resigned from the Presidency of BiH in order to take responsibility for the Orah affair.

The High Representative said that the SFOR discovery on 7 March this year of clear evidence that the VRS was engaged in aggressive intelligence operations against BiH institutions and citizens, and International Organizations working in BiH had compounded the damage done by the Orah affair.

These activities "clearly and seriously violated Dayton and COMSOF's Instructions to the Parties, upon which the peace and stability of this country is founded," he said. "It is no exaggeration to say that these activities could have placed this country's stability in jeopardy."

The High Representative said that both these affairs point to "the same issues of political responsibility and the systemic weaknesses in the civilian control over BiH's armed forces."

"Mr Sarovic was President of the RS when VZ Orah signed arms contracts with Iraq in direct contravention of UN Security Council Resolutions. With war now underway in Iraq, possibly involving weaponry exported from this country, I cannot overstate the seriousness of this affair," the High Representative said, adding that Mr Sarovic was also RS President when the VRS was spying on BiH citizens, SFOR, the IC, and neighbouring countries..

The High Representative emphasised that “in both cases, the constitution of the Republika Srpska itself establishes that Mr Sarovic was the senior official with political responsibility in these matters.”

The High Representative welcomed Mr Sarovic’s decision to “recognise his objective responsibility in these matters, and resign in the interests of the RS and BiH.” He said this was “an honourable act, which begins to set the standards for political responsibility which BiH needs to adhere to if it is to become a European democracy.”

The High Representative added that Mr Sarovic’s resignation “allows BiH to close the chapter and move forward with reform.”

He said that it is the responsibility of the institutions of BiH to choose a successor to Mr Sarovic, and expressed the wish that this be done as quickly as possible.