

High Representative Highlights Russian Role in Promoting “Dynamic of Reform” in BiH

The International Community in BiH are “united behind a common agenda: establishing the rule of law to crack down on crime and corruption, reforming the economy to generate jobs and prosperity, and helping BiH become a self-sustaining state capable of taking its rightful place within the European Union,” the High Representative, Paddy Ashdown, told Russian Foreign Minister Igor Ivanov during a meeting in Moscow today. He said Moscow was an indispensable part of this “common project ” and that Russia’s support was essential for the reform agenda in BiH to succeed. The HR told FM Ivanov that “time is not on BiH’s side. International assistance is declining and is not being replaced by foreign investment. Unless we pick up the pace of reform, BiH will become an impoverished and criminally-captured state”. The HR expressed his thanks to Minister Ivanov for the positive diplomatic role that Russia has played in recent BiH developments, noting, among other things, the creative contribution of Ambassador Alexander Grischenko during the recent discussions on Council of Ministers reform.

Minister Ivanov highlighted the importance of Economic reform, specifically regarding Customs and VAT at the State Level. Minister Ivanov confirmed the importance of these reforms in tackling crime and building effective governments. The High Representative and the Minister discussed the technical application and implementation of these reforms, and the Russian Government offered their assistance in this.

The High Representative is in Moscow at the invitation of the Russian Government. After his meeting with Minister Ivanov on Wednesday afternoon, the High Representative addressed the International Affairs Committee of the Duma.

“The reforms we are currently working on,” he told Minister Ivanov, “such as reforms to the central government – the Council of Ministers – and the introduction of a single customs and VAT system are examples of the changes that can, and must be made, compatible with Dayton and within the Constitution, to make Bosnia and Herzegovina work.”

He emphasised that reform has to become self-sustaining: “Only when the dynamic of obstructionism has been replaced by a dynamic of reform will we be able to declare our mission implemented,” and he expressed the hope that Russia would continue to play an active role in promoting this “dynamic of reform”.

Speaking to the members of the Duma, the High Representative described OHR’s six core tasks: “entrenching the rule of law; ensuring that extreme nationalists, leading war criminals and organised criminal networks cannot reverse peace implementation; reforming the economy; strengthening the capacity of BiH’s governing institutions, especially at the State level; establishing State-level command and control over armed forces and paving the way for integration into the Euro-Atlantic framework; and promoting the sustainable return of refugees and displaced persons.”

The High Representative noted that Russian troops serving in BiH as part of SFOR have sent a positive signal that Moscow has a distinctive and valuable role to play in international peacekeeping. Russia, he said, is an integral component in the effort “to bring BiH to the point at which it can continue its journey, like other transition countries in the region, with support from the International Community.”