

High Representative Holds Talks with Council of Europe Representatives

The High Representative, Wolfgang Petritsch, has completed two days of comprehensive discussions in Strasbourg with representatives of the Council of Europe. The talks focused on Bosnia and Herzegovina's prospects for accession to the Council.

The High Representative addressed the Committee of Ministers on Friday 22 June and the Political Affairs Committee of the Parliamentary Assembly on Saturday 23 June.

The High Representative noted that the BiH House of Representatives' failure to pass a draft Election Law is a significant setback. However, he also noted that passage of the law was not the only condition for BiH's accession to the Council. He argued that strict post-accession criteria should be applied in the event of BiH's acceptance as a Council member this year. Under such criteria, BiH politicians would be held accountable for continued and verifiable democratisation.

The High Representative acknowledged that Bosnia and Herzegovina has not met the pre-accession criteria formulated jointly by the Council and the OHR. Of 40 human-rights related conditions, only nine have been fully satisfied and six of these were imposed by the High Representative. However, he gave a generally more positive account of BiH's overall development since the November 2000 elections. He emphasised the fact that for the first time BiH has a government that embraces the idea of Bosnia and Herzegovina as a country. He also specifically referred to the increase in refugee returns and the better functioning of

some institutions.

Accession to the Council of Europe will lock Bosnia and Herzegovina's democratic agenda into the European political mainstream. At the same time, accession to the Council would make crystal clear to all the citizens of BiH that beneficial participation in European institutions comes through state, not Entity, bodies. Therefore, the High Representative asked the members of the Political Committee to give Bosnia another chance to successfully pass the Election Law before deciding on the accession to the Council of Europe.