

High Representative Meets French Foreign Minister

The High Representative met the French Foreign Minister, Dominique de Villpin, this morning in the Quai D'Orsay in Paris. The High Representative today is on a one-day visit to Paris to meet with top French Officials from the Foreign Ministry and the Office of the French Prime Minister to discuss BiH's reform programme, the EU role in BiH, and the forthcoming EU Thessaloniki Summit.

The High Representative briefed the Foreign Minister on the triple challenge that lies ahead of Bosnia and Herzegovina. First, transition, a process requiring difficult reforms, but one that can ultimately lead to EU membership as has been shown by the ten new EU accession states. Second, the building of State-level structures without which BiH cannot align itself closer to Europe. And third, the process of addressing BiH's horrific recent past, the key to which is the arrest of all those indicted for war crimes.

At the meeting, the High Representative set out his view of Europe's importance for Bosnia and Herzegovina. "EU enlargement was forged originally in a spirit of vision aimed at a stronger, wider Europe; a beacon of democracy and stability for the continent," he said. "As we consider the future of Europe, it is important to hold on to this conviction. Bosnia and Herzegovina is a European country, and a natural candidate for EU membership. The EU has united a divided continent. It now has the potential to end the instability that has plagued its South Eastern corner. The real possibility of EU membership is an unparallel incentive for the reforms that BiH needs, for its own sake – and for Europe's."

The High Representative emphasised that the Thessaloniki

Summit is an opportunity to move the EU integration agenda forward, so bolstering domestic reform. He recommended the setting up of a "Know How Fund" which will enable BiH, and other states in the region, to benefit from the experience of the ten new EU Accession States in bringing EU accession closer. The High Representative also called for continued financial support and for further infrastructure support. In addition, he pointed out that visa-free travel would do much to make Europe come alive in the minds of the region's citizens, and urged the Foreign Minister to support the EU setting out clearly at Thessaloniki the conditions that the countries of the region must meet for this to happen.

The High Representative thanked M. de Villpin for the support France has provided for Bosnia and Herzegovina, and for the OHR in particular. He noted that France is a key member of the PIC, and her support for the High Representative and the Justice and Jobs agenda is essential for the success of his mandate. He praised the role and quality of the French officials working in the OHR, and in particular the work of his French deputy, SDHR Ambassador Fassier, in establishing the Rule of Law pillar and taking forward the crucial Justice agenda.