

High Representative Sets Out Final Steps on ORAO

The International Community will take appropriate and effective steps to ensure that the systemic failure of control which produced the ORAO scandal is not permitted to happen again, High Representative Paddy Ashdown said today.

“We need to assess the degree and the extent of political responsibility and the degree and extent of the systematic failure to control the armed forces and the military-industrial complex, and we need to take action that responds to these issues,” the High Representative said.

On Wednesday, COMSFOR General William Ward wrote to RS President Dragan Cavic detailing the International Community’s initial response to the report on the ORAO affair submitted by the RS Supreme Defense Council to the Special Task Force, comprising SFOR, OHR, and OSCE, on 31 December. The Task Force has spent two months analysing and assessing the more than one-and-a-half thousand page report and has concluded that important pieces of information are missing. In his letter to Mr Cavic COMSFOR called for this information to be provided not later than 17 March.

“We’ve had three reports on ORAO, each better than the previous one but all inadequate to address the seriousness of this issue,” the High Representative said. “This scandal has done more damage to BiH’s international reputation than any other issue since the end of the war, and it goes to the very heart of inadequate control of the armed forces and the military industrial complex.”

The High Representative said 17 March was “the absolute deadline” for additional information to be supplied by the RS authorities and he said this date had been chosen because the

International Community's response to the RS Supreme Defence Council's report will be discussed, given the seriousness of the issue, at the Peace Implementation Council political directors' meeting in Brussels on 28 March. The International Community will then announce the measures that it intends to take.

"We will respond in a way that is appropriate to the seriousness of this issue," the High Representative said. "It is so important, the damage it has done to BiH's reputation is so great, the need to prevent this ever happening again so crucial, that the one option not available to me is to do nothing."