

**17. Statement on Bosnia and Herzegovina;
North Atlantic Council
10 DECEMBER 1996**

Substantial progress has been achieved in Bosnia and Herzegovina since the Peace Agreement was negotiated in Dayton and signed in Paris one year ago.

Peace has begun to take root after four years of tragic conflict and suffering.

Soldiers have been demobilised, national and regional elections have been held, common institutions are being established, barriers to free movement have begun to be dismantled and reconstruction is underway. However, much remains to be accomplished to bring an enduring peace after the years of war.

This will require the full commitment of all the leaders of Bosnia and Herzegovina and its two entities.

We express our deepest thanks to the NATO-led Implementation Force (IFOR) for the successful implementation of the military aspects of the Peace Agreement. IFOR has brought together 33 NATO and non-NATO countries in an unprecedented coalition for peace which has stabilised the country, and created the conditions for political and economic reconstruction. We pay tribute to the professionalism, dedication and bravery of all IFOR personnel and express deep sympathy to the families of those who have lost their lives and to those who have been injured in the cause of peace.

IFOR's mandate expires on 20th December 1996. Its mission has been accomplished, but an international military presence is still required to provide the stability necessary for consolidating the peace. NATO is therefore prepared to organise and lead a Stabilisation Force (SFOR) to take the place of IFOR authorised by a UN Security Council Resolution under Chapter VII of the UN Charter. SFOR will contribute to a secure environment necessary for the consolidation and stabilisation of peace by deterring or, if necessary, halting a resumption of hostilities. It will also provide time for political reconciliation and economic reconstruction to gain momentum. While the new force will be about half the size of IFOR, and its mission will be more limited, it will retain the same unity of command, robust rules of engagement, enforcement authority and status of forces that has made IFOR a success. SFOR, like IFOR, will carry out its tasks firmly, but evenhandedly. SFOR will also stand ready to provide emergency support to UNTAES in Eastern Slavonia, where UN forces are making a substantial contribution to the restoration of peace in the area.

NATO is planning for an 18-month mission for SFOR, to be reviewed at 6 and 12 months, with a view to progressively reducing the force's presence to a deterrent posture and eventually withdrawal. Preparations for the deployment of SFOR are well underway, and today we have endorsed the operational planning which will be finally approved by the Council in Permanent Session when the UN Security Council has provided the necessary authorisation.

NATO's preparations for SFOR have been conducted in close cooperation with Russia and the other non-NATO countries now contributing forces to IFOR. We are pleased that all 17 of these countries, and other new contributors, are willing to be part of SFOR. Our cooperation in Bosnia has enhanced the relations between the Allies, Russia and our other Partners and has moved Europe towards a new stage of security cooperation.

SFOR will contribute to consolidating the peace, but emphasis of international efforts must continue to move increasingly to the civilian aspects of the Peace Agreement. We pay tribute to the accomplishments of the High Representative and all the organisations involved in civilian implementation. Their future role will be essential. SFOR will, like IFOR, closely cooperate and coordinate with the High Representative and the major international organisations and agencies. It will, within capabilities, provide selective support on a case-by-case basis to assist in the fulfilment of their important tasks. It will also provide the security framework for the 1997 municipal elections and be prepared to provide other support, as appropriate, to the OSCE in the preparation and conduct of those elections. We fully endorse the guiding principles agreed in Paris for the two-year civilian consolidation plan and the action plan agreed in London for 1997.

The international community is committed to providing a wide range of assistance and advice. We reiterate that it is the responsibility of the people and leadership of Bosnia and Herzegovina and its neighbouring countries to promote reconciliation and the establishment of a lasting peace. We call on the parties to honour the Peace Agreement in full. We expect them to commit themselves wholeheartedly to seeking rapid progress in areas such as freedom of movement, the unhindered return of refugees and displaced persons, the restructuring and retraining of local police forces and full compliance with the arms control agreements. In this context, we strongly urge the parties fully and faithfully to implement the terms of the arms control agreements and to reduce their holdings to the agreed levels by 1 November 1997. We urge the parties to assist and cooperate fully with the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) in accordance with their undertakings in the Peace Agreement and to hand over to ICTY all persons indicted for war crimes. We expect the parties to cooperate fully with the International Police Task Force (IPTF).

Ensuring long-term peace and stability in former Yugoslavia will require democracy to grow and flourish not only in Bosnia and Herzegovina, but also in its neighbouring countries.

We strongly deplore the decision of the Serbian government to annul results of the November 17 municipal elections and call on the Serbian government to respect the democratic will of the people by reversing that decision. We are dismayed that the Serbian authorities have ignored the calls of the international community to respect internationally recognised democratic principles.

We commend the opposition for its adherence to non-violence and call upon the government to avoid any use of force against the peaceful protestors.
