A Perspective from the region

Dr. Miladen Ivanic, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Bosnia-Herzegovina, delivered the keynote address to the conference. While his remarks focused on problems facing his own country, Dr. Ivanic set the stage for a positive evaluation for future prospects of the region as a whole. He noted that, compared to other countries in the region, Bosnia-Herzegovina is dealing not only with transition issues, but also with post-war reconstruction. He emphasized that Bosnia-Herzegovina has a democratically elected government and is making progress in establishing rule of law, securing rights for minority groups, harmonizing legal systems and re-establishing regional contacts. Bosnia-Herzegovina recognizes the importance of regional cooperation; for example, it has established free trade agreements and other forms of cooperation with Bulgaria, Croatia, FYR Macedonia and Serbia-Montenegro.

One of Bosnia-Herzegovina's key problems, according to its Foreign Minister, is its poor economic performance, with an unemployment rate of over 40%. Dr. Ivanic argued that his country was expected to reach its pre-war GDP growth by 2030. He added that these serious economic problems could exacerbate interethnic tensions, scapegoating being the most convenient and conventional means for rationalization of the unfavourable economic situation in the country. In addition, the economic situation is the most often quoted barrier to the return of refugees and displaced people.

On the ideological level, the three constituent peoples of Bosnia-Herzegovina are still concerned about their national identity. However, Dr. Ivanic believes that his country's integration into the European Union would reduce the "sovereignty issue" to a minimum and would alleviate the economic problems of the country.

Panel 1, Southeastern Europe: From Stabilization to Integration

The objective of the first panel was to provide an overview of the current trends in the political development of Southeastern European countries in order to set the basis for an assessment of prospects for regional integration.

Focusing on the situation in Serbia-Montenegro and Macedonia, **Jan Kickert, Minister-Counsellor with the Austrian Embassy in Ottawa**, identified three issues that he perceived most challenging for these two countries: political instability, the so-called "Albanian question," and organized crime and corruption. Mr. Kickert made it clear that he was not representing the official position of the Austrian Government in his comments, but that they reflected his personal assessment.

Mr. Kickert argued that the future of Serbia-Montenegro remains unclear, even more the final status of Kosovo. In his opinion, Serbia-Montenegro is a "very loose union of two equal states;" they are actually less integrated than EU countries are with one another. Mr. Kickert considers important the consolidation of the political landscape in Serbia-Montenegro. Although he presented the political developments in Macedonia as "mostly positive," there still exists alienation and a sensitive balance of power between