

OHR's Statement at the International Agencies' Joint Press Conference

Welcome from OHR. Before I start just one message from our colleagues from EUPM. Their apologies for not being with us here today but they are preparing their own press conference for 15.00 on launch of police reform campaign and they hope you all will be there.

Parliamentarians Propose To Increase Their Own Benefits

BiH Parliamentarians are preparing once again to attempt to increase the benefits and privileges that they are entitled to through the Law on Rights and Duties of the Members of the Parliamentary Assembly of BiH (Zakon o pravima i duznostima clanova Parlamentarne skupstine BiH). This legislation is to be considered by the Constitutional and Legal Committee of the BiH House of Representatives today. The text is exactly the same as that presented to Parliament in the latter part of 2003, which was subsequently rejected as a result of outrage in the media and among the public.

This legislation, if it were enacted, would have significant budgetary implications that the State budget may not be able to cover. It would set a precedent for other government institutions. It is utterly indefensible in view of the fact that pensioners, recipients of welfare, teachers, and other budget beneficiaries receive barely enough to make ends meet. Here's just one example: this law would enable Parliamentarians to have pensions as high as 2,500 KM, while the average pension in the BiH is 197KM.

This proposal is particularly scandalous coming as it does at a time when the authorities have committed themselves to addressing the unsustainable cost of governance in BiH. The

sprawling administrative structure means that citizens are paying too much money for too little service. Even the status quo is fiscally unsustainable and to act now to increase this burden would be indefensible. Parliamentarians should be discussing what they can do to make the lives of citizens better, not what they can do to make their own, already privileged, circumstances better.

It is also important to note that the BiH House of Representatives at its 43rd session on 8 September 2004 introduced a moratorium on all laws and decisions introducing new privileges to elected officials. Put simply, if the Law on Rights and Duties of Delegates is adopted tomorrow the HoR's Constitutional and Legal Commission will be in direct violation of its own decision.

Ambassador Wnendt Visiting Mostar

The Senior Deputy High Representative, Werner Wnendt, is in Mostar today where he is meeting Mostar city officials. Ambassador Wnendt will discuss the current process of unification of Mostar, focusing on unification of institutions, when he meets Mayor Ljubo Beslic and President of the City Council Murat Coric.

The SDHR will also visit the premises of the Federation Civil Service Branch Office in Mostar, where he will meet the Head of the Branch Office, Mirjana Kutanjac, and discuss the implementation of the civil service law in the Herzegovina-Neretva Canton and the West Herzegovina Canton.

It is essential to make the Federation Civil Service Agency and its branch offices fully operational because this agency will lead a systematic overhaul of, and improvement in, the services that are offered to Federation residents across the whole range of activities through which civil servants serve members of the public.

As part of BiH's public administration reform, the OHR is

assisting the domestic authorities in building up a modern, professional and merit-based civil service throughout the country, which will provide citizens with the services they need and will eventually lead BiH into European structures.