

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

Police Reform

We have been inundated with questions concerning a referendum on police reform in Republika Srpska during the past two days.

The OHR's position is clear in this matter.

In October 2005, the National Assembly of Republika Srpska, the Federation Parliament and the Parliament of Bosnia and Herzegovina endorsed a Police Reform Agreement in which they committed themselves to restructuring the police in line with three principles laid down by the European Union.

The text of the Police Reform Agreement was proposed by Dragan Cavic and was supported by all SNSD delegates present in the RS National Assembly. The National Assembly of Republika Srpska was first to adopt the Agreement, only later was it also accepted by Federation-based parties.

Based on the commitments and endorsements of the October Agreement, the European Union agreed to open talks on a Stabilisation and Association Agreement with Bosnia and Herzegovina.

In the Agreement, the authorities of Bosnia and Herzegovina and both entities also committed themselves to establish and support the work of a Police Directorate, which would prepare an implementation plan for police restructuring.

The Directorate was then established by a vote of the Council of Ministers in December. In this way, it was also endorsed by those Ministers nominated by the parties from Republika Srpska and represented in the Council of Ministers. There were no dissenting opinions or outvoting in the Council of Minister's decision.

After the Directorate finishes its proposed implementation plan, the plan will go to entity and state governments and parliaments to be agreed. This is the framework for police restructuring. The three EU principles allow for the interests of Republika Srpska as well as the Federation to be accommodated.

It is not obvious how a referendum would help the interests of Republika Srpska or its citizens, since finalising this important reform will not only help this country conclude the SAA, but also to lead to more EU flexibility on issuing visas, as well as other benefits that come to countries and their citizens that are on the path to Europe.

Reneging on the October Agreement would have serious consequences for the signing of the SAA. Any such setback would affect the particular interests of the citizens of Republika Srpska as much as those of the Federation.

Banja Luka Reception

The High Representative and Special EU Representative, Christian Schwarz-Schilling, will be hosting a reception for the new Deputy High Representative, Clarisse Pasztory, tonight in Banja Luka.

Ms Pasztory assumed her duties as Deputy High Representative on Wednesday 8 November and the reception will be an opportunity to meet representatives of Republika Srpska's political and media.

The reception will take place at 20.00 at the Citadela Restaurant, Kralja Alfonsa XIII, 2. Cameramen and photographers are invited to cover the event.

On the second day of his visit to Banja Luka, tomorrow, the High Representative and EU Special Representative, Christian Schwarz-Schilling, will meet with the President and Prime Minister of Republika Srpska, Milan Jelic and Milorad Dodik.