OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media Invited to BiH

Peter Bas-Backer, OHR's Senior Deputy High Representative, and Douglas Davidson, Head of the OSCE Mission to BiH, concerned that the freedom of the media in Bosnia and Herzegovina may be coming under threat, wrote yesterday to Miklós Haraszti, the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media, inviting him to visit BiH, in order to provide an independent assessment of the situation.

In recent weeks a series of events, which have implications for media freedom and media reform, have generated concern. The initial incident was the Republika Srpska Government decision to boycott the state-level public broadcaster, BHT1. The Office of the Republika Srpska President subsequently refused to even grant BHTV1 access to press conferences.

The Ambassadors of the Steering Board of the Peace Implementation Council, the *ad hoc* international body that oversees progress on fulfilling the terms of the Dayton Peace Agreement, have also expressed their concern, and support the visit of the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media.

Recent history suggests such concern may be justified. In the former Yugoslavia the state-controlled broadcast media played a significant role in fanning the flames of ethnic hatred thereby contributing to some of the excesses of the Wars of

Yugoslav Disintegration. As a result, the international community helped to oversee media reform with the aim of instilling the concept of a free and independent media as an essential component of a democratic society.