

# High Representative Calls For BiH Commitment To Voter Registration

The High Representative, Christian Schwarz-Schilling, met today with representatives of BiH's Election Commission (EC), Citizens Identification Protection System (CIPS) Directorate, the BiH Ministry of Finance and Treasury (MoFT), the BiH Ministry of Civil Affairs, as well as parliamentarians who participated in the working group on Election Law Amendments, to discuss Passive Voter Registration, a system which should simplify the voting process and encourage voters back to the polling booths.

"Election turnout has dropped off – from a high of 80% in 1996 to 46% in 2004. In part this is because at every election people need to go and register in order to be able to vote", said the High Representative. "Elections represent the pinnacle of the democratic process. Nothing is more important than citizens being able to exercise their right to vote, and to participate in elections".

The current voter registration system, termed 'Active Voter Registration', requires each voter to register for each election. By making use of the CIPS database to register voters there will no longer be a need for voters to re-register ahead of every election, their registration would be automatic through the CIPS database – this is called 'Passive Voter Registration'.

The time needed to introduce this system is of crucial importance. A number of technical requirements, including finding the required funding, procuring and installing equipment, hiring and training personnel and ensuring that accurate voter information is collected, must all be completed

ahead of the elections – in seven and a half months time. If by the end of April the financing is not assured, and procurement not completed, the Passive Voter Registration system will not be sufficiently prepared by October, which could result in a delay to the 2006 elections. To succeed, this project will require coordination across all level of Government, at the State level, and at municipal, cantonal and entity level, to ensure that voter information is accurate. The MoFT expressed its support to this project at the meeting today.

“I am very happy to hear that the BiH EC and the CIPS Directorate have initiated the introduction of Passive Voter Registration. I am convinced that Passive Voter Registration will help to increase the turnout of voters” the High Representative said noting that “implementing this [system] represents a significant challenge, which you need to achieve in a relatively short period. If you manage this, you will have demonstrated the capacity and maturity of BiH’s own institutions, not only to the International Community, but more importantly, to your own electorate.”

On 2 February this year the BiH Council of Ministers endorsed the proposal to introduce Passive Voter Registration for the 2006 elections. The Council of Ministers has tasked the BiH EC, the MoFT, Ministry of Civil Affairs, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Ministry of Human Rights and Refugees to co-ordinate, monitor and manage the new system.