

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

Economic Report

I've brought along copies of the OHR's monthly Economic Report. As you know, the Report offers a snapshot of the BiH economy by highlighting key indicators – money supply, trade figures, currency, employment figures and stock-market indices.

As you will see, November continued a trend of substantial export growth that has been evident since the beginning of 2004. Imports grew by just over two percent, while export growth topped 19 percent. This is a welcome and significant trend – the trade balance is still seriously skewed, with BiH spending more than it earns, but the gap between exports and imports is narrowing. This will have a clear and positive impact on citizens' lives – as BiH companies increase their sales abroad they are able to create more jobs at home.

An even more dramatic increase was recorded in the November turnover of the Sarajevo and Banja Luka stock exchanges. Turnover on the Sarajevo bourse rose by more than 50 percent and in BL the increase was above 60 percent. This reflects growing investor confidence in BiH shares. Both markets remain small, and the actual turnover figures are modest – but the November figures show that the markets are beginning to channel capital in an efficient way into companies that are perceived as having real commercial potential. Again, this has positive implications for citizens – because when these companies are adequately funded they can expand, boost sales and create jobs.

Protecting the Cultural Heritage of BiH and all its Peoples

Also, I would draw your attention this morning to a letter that was sent over the weekend to individual members of the Council of Ministers by the High Representative. In his letter the High Representative draws attention to the present difficult situation of the seven cultural institutions of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

These are the National Museum , the Museum of History , the Museum of Literature , the BiH Art Gallery , the National and University Library, the National Library for the Blind and Vision Impaired, and the National Film Archive.

Under the Dayton Peace Agreement the State has an obligation to maintain these institutions. However, due to an anomaly in the budget mechanism, they have had to operate without any BiH funding since the end of the war. As many of you will know, the National Museum and the Museum of History have recently had to close due to lack of funds.

In his letter, the High Representative makes the point that the issue is not simply one of public amenities. These institutions are repositories of the cultural heritage of BiH and all its peoples. Documents and artefacts that testify to this heritage – a priceless component of European culture – are now in danger of being damaged because sensible provision for their upkeep has not been made. Schoolchildren and students from all over the country are unable to make use of these resources – which would be major teaching tools in any other country – because they are not being properly run. And these institutions are not being used – as they should be being used – as valuable resources in the tourism sector and in projecting a positive image of BiH.

In his letter the High Representative urges the Council of Ministers to take whatever measures may be necessary to ensure

that funding of BiH's seven cultural institutions is allocated in the 2005 budget.