

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

High Representative Returns after His American - European Tour

The High Representative will today return to Sarajevo after visiting Washington , New York , London and Brussels . Yesterday, and over the weekend, he met with the EU High Representative for a Common Security and Foreign policy Javier Solana, the new head of the European commission Jose Manuel Barroso, and other EU officials. On Monday he had a working lunch with NATO ambassadors and met with the new EU enlargement commission Olli Rehn. The participants in the meetings agreed that failure to co-operate with the ICTY is now the biggest obstacle to BiH's NATO and EU aspirations. They noted that the RS government has failed to give the ICTY the information it needs to track down indictees, and has also failed to take any significant action to arrest indictees itself.

OHR Concerned over Proposed Benefits Increase

BiH Parliament is set to try once again to increase benefits to state employees through proposed amendments to the BiH Civil Service and Labour Laws.

The BiH Parliament's Administrative and Finance Committees at a joint session on 10 November adopted a set of the amendments to the BiH Labour and Civil Service Laws recommending consideration of the proposed amendments under urgent procedure at the next session of the BiH House of Representatives on 2 December. If urgent procedure were accepted, no amendments would be allowed to the draft.

This legislation, which has not been agreed by the BiH Ministry of Finance – and therefore there is no clear idea of budgetary implications – would increase spending on BiH's already bloated bureaucracy to unforeseeable levels. The financial burden of these changes would again fall on the taxpayer.

For example, under the proposed amendments;

- civil servants would receive financial compensation if one of their family members were taken ill. What is more, the provisions of entitlement are unclear which means that they could be easily misinterpreted or abused.
- levels of compensation would be set by Council of Ministers, which effectively means that the recipients will be able to define the allowances as they like. Needless to say such a situation could lead to serious irregularities.

Many of you will recall the earlier attempt this year by the same Committee who proposed the controversial Law on increasing the salaries and benefits of the Parliamentarians. That attempt was blocked by heavy media pressure and negative public opinion.

The Ministry of Finance has not been consulted in drafting the proposed amendments and OHR feels that such an increase, with no indication of the financial and budgetary indications, is nothing short of scandalous, particularly when pensions remain frighteningly low, health workers are not receiving salary's and school children are struggling to buy school books.