

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

International Organizations Urge Faster Progress on Higher Education, Procurement and Invalids & Veterans' Legislation

The members of the Board of Principals and the Council of Europe urge the BiH State and Entity authorities to speed up key economic and social reforms in order to enable better living standards for all BiH citizens, and the continuation of reconstruction and development efforts in the country.

Specifically, the Board of Principals urges the BiH State Parliament to adopt the Higher Education Law. Passage is needed to improve the quality of the BiH education system through more efficient use of tax payers' and students' resources, by developing common quality assessment procedures and prescribing common standards at the State level and financing at the Entity level.

In addition, both Entities should as soon as possible adopt the new Public Procurement legislation, needed to create a professional, transparent and corruption-free public procurement system. This is a crucial condition for the continuation of the EU accession process as well as World Bank supported economic management reforms.

The Board of Principals also urged the Entity authorities to speed up passage of appropriate war veterans' and invalids' legislation by the end of this month as part of continued social sector reform. This new legislation will provide for a better and more balanced and transparent use of public resources, where social payments would be aimed at the most needy beneficiaries.

The international organizations gathered at the Board of Principals stressed that these and other reforms are not just important because they provide for the continuation of the EU accession process, and access to new World Bank assistance worth US\$ 93 million, but because it is only through reforms such as these that better living standards, new jobs and adequate social services for all citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina can be secured.

PDHR Donald Hays, On Investment and Direct Election of Mayors

PDHR Hays spoke yesterday at an international investment conference in London. In his speech, Ambassador Hays pointed out that as a result of reforms implemented in the course of the last year or so the BiH investment climate has moved from "inclement" to "mild". Ambassador Hays called on international investors to take a fresh look at BiH. I quote "I do not appeal to your sense of humanitarian solidarity or good will. I appeal to your good business sense. This is an economy that is rapidly righting itself. It is a country that is in the heart of an emerging free-trade zone, that is on the doorstep of the European Union, that has a renewed infrastructure, a modern fiscal and banking system and a rapidly developing SME sector."

I've brought along copies of the speech.

Due to a flight delay in London, Ambassador Hays was unable to participate at a conference organized by the Friedrich Ebert Foundation in Sarajevo this morning. However, the speech he prepared for the conference on direct election of Mayors and opportunities that arise from this will be read out on his behalf.

I've brought along copies.

Also, Ambassador Hays tomorrow addresses a conference of

Mayors from Central Bosnia Canton, in Vitez. He will point out, among other things, that the introduction of direct election of mayors in the Federation offers the political parties an opportunity to draft in some new faces. The October elections present a remarkably good opportunity for the political parties to introduce a new generation of politicians. BiH politics needs an infusion of youth, energy and new ideas and the parties can take advantage of the extension of direct mayoral elections to the Federation to produce just such an infusion.

We will be issuing a media advisory on the Vitez meeting later today.