

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

OHR calls on CoM to adopt adequate draft PBS legislation on Thursday

The OHR is calling on the Council of Ministers to meet their own deadline for implementing this requirement of the EC's Feasibility Study, and adopt adequate state-level public broadcasting legislation at their session on Thursday.

The OHR regrets that Mr Dokic considers being asked to meet the requirements of European integration as blackmail and pressure. The OHR looks forward to the day when BiH Ministers will not need to be told what to do to get into Europe, but will actively take responsibility for the process and do it willingly. In short, the OHR looks forward to the day when every BiH Minister puts the interests and future well-being of the citizens of BiH above their own narrow political interests.

Mr Dokic's draft legislation is inadequate because it fails to respect the three Prime Ministers' Agreement of 6 November 2003. In particular, it fails to respect the requirement in the Agreement to create, and I quote from that Agreement, "a joint legal entity, legally established by the three broadcasters, accountable to the System Board of Governors, and responsible for property management, technical resources, advertising, international representation, foreign programme rights, and harmonising systems, policies and procedures across the three broadcasters." Copies of the OHR's commentary on why Mr Dokic's legislation does not respect the 3 Prime Ministers' Agreement are available outside.

The European Commission have said clearly that unless this legislation respects the PM's Agreement in full, then it will not meet the requirements set out in the EC's Feasibility Study. That means Mr Dokic's draft is putting the European future of BiH at risk.

The OHR is therefore calling on the Council of Ministers to adopt Mr Dokic's draft legislation on Thursday, but suitably amended to bring it fully into line with the 3 Prime Ministers' Agreement. The OHR is concerned that Mr Dokic's suggestion of a public consultation process may simply be a delaying tactic. First, it is not necessary. Second, it has never been done before in BiH. And third, it would mean that the Council of Minister's missed its deadline for

implementing the Feasibility Study. This law needs to be fully debated. But the right place to do that, as in any democracy, is in Parliament, and as soon as possible.

Law on Public Procurement

On another issue, the RS government's refusal to endorse the Law on Public Procurement has also jeopardised the chances of BiH fulfilling the European Commission's Feasibility Study requirements.

It has also led the European Commission to suspend its assistance in establishing a BiH Public Procurement Agency and Procurement Review Body.

The implications for further integration in the EU are clear and serious. In addition the RS government's stance has brought to a halt efforts to safeguard hundreds of millions of KM in citizens' funds spent on procurement each year by the various governments.

The RS Government committed itself at the end of last year to passing this law, as part of the measures to respond to the scandal in public companies uncovered by the Special Auditor's reports. Prime Minister Mikerevic personally lent his support to this law.

In the OHR's view, the failure to pass this law would be deeply damaging to BiH's European ambitions, and the chance of its citizens of one day enjoying the prosperity and security that EU membership would provide. The OHR calls on the RS government to put the interests of the citizens of BiH first, and fulfill the commitment it made last year, by endorsing swift passage of an appropriate procurement law acceptable to the European Commission.

HR with Defense Minister

On a more positive note, the High Representative Paddy Ashdown will hold his first meeting with BiH Defense Minister Nikola Radovanovic on Wednesday. His appointment is the first step toward creating a functional and efficient State Ministry of Defense. The High Representative and BiH's citizens look forward to Mr. Radovanovic's appointment being a catalyst for the essential reforms that BiH and its entities must now put in place if BiH is to meet the PfP requirements before the NATO Summit in Istanbul this summer. A Media Advisory with all the details of this meeting will be issued later in the day.

PDHR in Zvornik

Ambassador Hays, along with RS Minister for Economy, Energy and Development Milan Bogicevic will be traveling to Zvornik and Bratunac tomorrow to meet municipality staff and local businesspeople. The PDHR has been visiting municipalities around the country to learn more about the kinds of municipal initiative that have successfully lured investment and create new jobs in local communities. He has also been briefed on the programs that municipalities have undertaken, either by themselves or with government or International Community partners, to deliver better services to citizens more economically and more efficiently. A Media advisory is available outside.