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

Steering Board Ambassadors Meet Today in Sarajevo

The Ambassadors of the Peace Implementation Council Steering Board will meet this afternoon.

They will be discussing the recent political party criticisms of the judicial reappointment process and the effect that this may have on BiH’s future and plans for closer EU integration. They will also discuss priorities for 2004.

High Representative Press Conference on Wednesday

The High Representative, Paddy Ashdown, will hold an extraordinary press conference in Sarajevo tomorrow. The High Representative is concerned that much of the progress that BiH has made towards further Euro-Atlantic integration in the last year could be lost if the focus on reforms in BiH is blunted. The High Representative will underline the fact that BiH has less than six months to implement an ambitious reform agenda if it has any hope of negotiating a Stability and Association Agreement with the EU or gaining membership of Partnership for Peace. He will underline that he will not sit by whilst BiH slips backwards.

The High Representative will discuss the Rule of Law and Security reforms that BiH must undertake to protect its citizens, to play a competent role in the fight against global terrorism and to show that it’s serious about arresting those indicted for war crimes. This means establishing a single professional intelligence agency and implementing state-level law enforcement, as well as a single, independent High

Judicial and Prosecutorial Council. These are not luxuries that BiH can acquire in leisurely fashion – they are prerequisites for the safety of this country; they cannot be jeopardised because of short-term party-political self interest or because of administrative incompetence.

On the reform of the Mostar City Administration, the Peace Implementation Council, the EU and, most importantly, the citizens of Mostar want a single administration with guaranteed power-sharing. The High Representative has reviewed the report proposed by the Mostar Commission under the chairmanship of Norbert Winterstein. All sides agreed at the start of the process that the current situation is untenable, and the HR considers that the Winterstein report offers the best hope for breaking the deadlock that has plagued all previous efforts to give the people of Mostar a fair, efficient and unified administration. The High Representative has made it clear that he will uphold the principals of ending parallelism and preventing any one Constituent people from dominating the rest.

We will be issuing a media advisory with the details of the press conference later in the day.

Banovici Coal Mine

As many of you will know, the Federation Government recently passed a decision removing three members of the Steering Board of the Banovici Coal Mine near Tuzla. The Federation Ombudsman's Office prevented an attempt by the Federation Government to remove all five members of the Steering Board in July last year. An appeal against the latest government decision has been lodged with the Ombudsman's Office, on the grounds that the Board members have not been informed of their removal in writing (a legal requirement), and that there is no evidence of conflict of interest – the reason given by the government for the removals.

OHR calls on the Federation Government to wait for the Ombudsman's decision before proceeding with these removals.

Documented evidence of management irregularities should be presented in support of removals. In the meantime, the Ombuidsman's Office must be allowed to examine the facts.

Any attempt to secure control of this company for reasons of party-political advantage or irregular commercial gain must be thwarted. We assume the Federation Government agrees with us on this point.

PDHR in Gradačac

The Principal Deputy High Representative, Donald Hays, will visit Gradačac on Tuesday 6 January 2004. Ambassador Hays will hold discussions with Municipal officials and workers and managers at local companies. The object of this visit is to explore and highlight ways in which municipalities can significantly improve the services they offer citizens, and examine initiatives through which local authorities can promote economic opportunities so as to help create new jobs in their communities.

Ambassador Hays will join Gradačac Mayor Ferhat Mustafić and Tuzla Canton Governor Bajazit Jašarević. They will visit the recently rebuilt "Husein kapetan Gradaščević" tower in the center of Gradačac and then call on three local companies before visiting the Gradačac Business Incubator, a facility sponsored by the Municipality, which is currently used by around 20 enterprises.

Season's Greetings

The High Representative extends his best wishes to all those who are celebrating Christmas.