

High Representative Pledges Support for Public Broadcasting

The High Representative wishes to reiterate his commitment to supporting the establishment of genuine public broadcasting in Bosnia and Herzegovina in line with best European practice.

The appointment last week of an interim Board of Governors at Radio Television BiH is an important, historic step that brings this country closer to the European community of states and eventual membership in the Council of Europe and the European Union. A robust public broadcasting sector, free of direct political control and financially secure, is a cornerstone of European democracy and is crucial to the creation of a pluralistic climate in BiH.

The interim Board of Governors ratified by the High Representative includes talented individuals from a range of professions and backgrounds. The Board is well placed to address the difficult task of restructuring the network and drawing up a proposal for a public broadcasting corporation. The High Representative extends his appreciation to the Board members who have accepted the assignment to secure a better future for public broadcasting.

There have been some comments in the press about the appointment of the Board and the restructuring effort which have been less than helpful.

The Memorandum of Understanding on the restructuring of RTV BiH was the product of extensive consultations. The MOU was an attempt to build political consensus and to prepare the ground for a comprehensive legal framework for public broadcasting in accordance with the Dayton Peace Agreement. Although the Presidency has no legal authority over the television, the High Representative consulted with the Presidency members in the spirit of cooperation and constructive engagement.

The MOU was signed by the chairman of the Presidency, Alija Izetbegovic, the Croat member of the Presidency, Kresimir Zubak, as well as the leadership of the Trade Union of RTV BiH. The MOU clearly states that the Presidency offers nominations for the interim Board of Governors subject to ratification by the High Representative.

The Office of the High Representative has strictly adhered to the MOU at all times and even held consultations before the ratification.

The High Representative decided to accept only some of the nominations offered by the Presidency members in the interest of ratifying a Board without political party officials and with the widest possible support among all of this country's peoples.

There is no time for public squabbling over the appointment of the Board. Public broadcasting in this country is facing financial and legal difficulties. The High Representative expects political leaders to concentrate their efforts on drafting legislation which has been sorely lacking and on attracting financial and technical assistance for RTV BiH.

The principle behind the restructuring process has been obscured at times in recent public discussion.

The High Representative, and the countries sponsoring the peace agreement, firmly believe that no political party or leader has the legal or moral right to control any media paid for by taxpayers. Public television belongs to the public. This principle has been the driving force behind the reform of public media across Bosnia and Herzegovina, including the restructuring process under way at SRT.

Instead of rhetoric, the time has come for practical action which will ensure that public broadcasting serves all the constituent peoples of this country.

The High Representative is optimistic that the consensus which emerged from the signing of the MOU will allow for a successful and smooth restructuring process.